

The Complete Sherlock Holmes
Arthur Conan Doyle

Chapter and Verse Edition

Full Version

Compiled by Paul Thomas Miller

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733	The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist
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953	The Adventure of the Devil's Foot
968	His Last Bow
979	The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes
980	Preface
981	The Illustrious Client
997	The Blanched Soldier
1009	The Adventure Of The Mazarin Stone
1021	The Adventure of the Three Gables
1033	The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire
1044	The Adventure of the Three Garridebs
1055	The Problem of Thor Bridge
1071	The Adventure of the Creeping Man
1083	The Adventure of the Lion's Mane
1095	The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger
1102	The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place
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Introduction

The intention of this project was to provide a system whereby specific sentences in The Canon could be referenced easily, modelled on the chapter and verse system of the Christian Bible. It is of little use if only one or two people have it. Therefore, I encourage anyone to share it. Feel free to share it via email, as a download on your website, as a print out... whatever. I don't mind. I'm not seeking to make money or website hits through this project. I just want to make it easier to talk about The Canon. Just one note of caution: the last few stories of the Case-Book are still in copyright in the United States. This will not expire until 1st January 2023. Before this date, then, it would be illegal to share this text in the U.S. and you should not do this.

There are many different versions of The Canon available. Changes were made in several of the texts in different publications. Most of the differences are not terribly significant so I wasn't too concerned about this.

The Canon text I have used here was the easiest version I could get hold of in a downloadable format – that supplied by the wonderful sherlock-holm.es website. This would seem to be the versions of the stories as first published in the United States. There were a few errors in this text, mostly in punctuation. For those I spotted, I double-checked against the original Strand publications and corrected where necessary. I would imagine there were others which I have missed. I can only beg your forgiveness for each of them. I did not trouble myself to correct the American spellings to Actual English. For UK readers who find this too difficult to cope with, I have included an appendix with all the missing “u”s in it.

There are only two factors I am personally bothered by in Canonical variance. In each case I have ensured they are presented here in my preferred format. Firstly, there is the reference to a month in the Musgrave Ritual (MUSG 1:189-190) even though it did not feature in the original Strand publication. I have made sure it is in this version because the ritual does not make sense without it. Secondly, I have strong views about CARD. I've always felt it deserved its place in the Memoirs, so that's where I put it. Because I could. It is well known, too, that when Doyle suppressed CARD, he transposed its introduction onto RESI. I have ensured that the version of RESI presented here has its original Strand opening.

Finally, I have chosen to order the stories in the the following way: all four long stories followed by the Adventures, then Memoirs, the Return, Last Bow and Case-Book. This is for people who may choose to print and bind the text. As one volume it would be unwieldy. Instead, then, it may be bound as three volumes – Volume One: The Long Stories, Volume Two: Adventures and Memoirs and Volume Three: Return, Last Bow and Case-Book.

Using Jay Finley Christ's already established four-letter system for each of the sixty stories, we may now add digits representing chapter and verse. In this instance a “verse” is simply a sentence. I've applied this rule throughout, with the result that some “verses” are rather long complicated sentences full of clauses, commas and colons and others are incredibly terse. See, for example, STUD 2:127 which in its entirety is simply the word “*You!*” Nevertheless, I had to come up with some easily applicable rule and I believe the one sentence as one verse rule was the most workable.

For those not used to the chapter and verse system, verses may be referred to as:

[STORY CODE] [CHAPTER NUMBER]:[VERSE NUMBER]

Using this method the first sentence of the second chapter of A Study In Scarlet may be given as simply “STUD 2:1” instead of having to write out the whole sentence: “*We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221b, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting.*”

Stories which do not contain chapters will be referred to as a whole as chapter 1. The Yellow Face, for example, runs in its entirety from YELL 1:1 up to YELL 1:449.

A difficulty was found in both A Study in Scarlet and The Valley of Fear which both consist of two parts, with the chapter numbers reverting to 1 at the start of part two. The chapter and verse system provides no simple way to differentiate between “Part 1, Chapter 1” and “Part 2, Chapter 2”. To avoid confusion, these chapter numbers have been changed so that Study now runs from chapter 1 to 14 and Valley now runs from chapter 1 to 15. This allows the “parts” to be rendered redundant.

Finally, I should point out that I created this version by a long laborious process of inserting little numbers before each and every sentence in a word processor. The chances of me having performed this task without making any mistakes is incredibly remote. I’ve done my best and am content to leave the project as you now find it. Such mistakes that there are will have to be lived with. No doubt providence had her reasons for making my hand slip or my mind wander.

Yours,

Paul Thomas Miller

The Jay Finley Christ Abbreviations

For the uninitiated, I provide the key to the Jay Finley Christ four-letter abbreviations here in alphabetical order, along with the page numbers where the stories may be found:

1021	3GAB	The Three Gables
1044	3GAR	The Three Garridebs
804	3STU	The Three Students
845	ABBE	The Abbey Grange
498	BERY	The Beryl Coronet
766	BLAC	Black Peter
997	BLAN	The Blanched Soldier
442	BLUE	The Blue Carbuncle
399	BOSC	The Boscombe Valley Mystery
910	BRUC	The Bruce-Partington Plans
546	CARD	The Cardboard Box
780	CHAS	Charles Augustus Milverton
513	COPP	The Copper Beeches
1071	CREE	The Creeping Man
619	CROO	The Crooked Man
716	DANC	The Dancing Men
953	DEVI	The Devil's Foot
929	DYIN	The Dying Detective
689	EMPT	The Empty House
471	ENGR	The Engineer's Thumb
677	FINA	The Final Problem
415	FIVE	The Five Orange Pips
582	GLOR	The "Gloria Scott"
816	GOLD	The Golden Pince-Nez
642	GREE	The Greek Interpreter
143	HOUN	The Hound of the Baskervilles
388	IDEN	A Case of Identity
981	ILLU	The Illustrious Client

940	LADY	The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax
968	LAST	His Last Bow
1083	LION	The Lion's Mane
1009	MAZA	The Mazarin Stone
831	MISS	The Missing Three-Quarter
594	MUSG	The Musgrave Ritual
654	NAVA	The Naval Treaty
484	NOBL	The Noble Bachelor
701	NORW	The Norwood Builder
745	PRIO	The Priory School
897	REDC	The Red Circle
373	REDH	The Red-Headed League
606	REIG	The Reigate Squires
630	RESI	The Resident Patient
1114	RETI	The Retired Colourman
356	SCAN	A Scandal in Bohemia
859	SECO	The Second Stain
1102	SHOS	Shoscombe Old Place
73	SIGN	The Sign of the Four
530	SILV	Silver Blaze
791	SIXN	The Six Napoleons
733	SOLI	The Solitary Cyclist
455	SPEC	The Speckled Band
570	STOC	The Stockbroker's Clerk
1	STUD	A Study in Scarlet
1033	SUSS	The Sussex Vampire
1055	THOR	The Problem of Thor Bridge
427	TWIS	The Man with the Twisted Lip
248	VALL	The Valley of Fear
1095	VEIL	The Veiled Lodger
878	WIST	Wisteria Lodge
559	YELL	The Yellow Face

A Study In Scarlet

PART I.

(Being a reprint from the reminiscences of

John H. Watson, M.D.,

late of the Army Medical Department.)

Chapter I.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

¹In the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London, and proceeded to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the army. ²Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers as Assistant Surgeon. ³The regiment was stationed in India at the time, and before I could join it, the second Afghan war had broken out. ⁴On landing at Bombay, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy's country. ⁵I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and succeeded in reaching Candahar in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties.

⁶The campaign brought honours and promotion to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster. ⁷I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. ⁸There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. ⁹I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

¹⁰Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar. ¹¹Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the verandah, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. ¹²For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England. ¹³I was dispatched, accordingly, in the troopship Orontes, and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.

¹⁴I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air—or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. ¹⁵Under such circumstances, I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. ¹⁶There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought. ¹⁷So alarming did the state of my finances become, that I soon realized that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. ¹⁸Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and to take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.

¹⁹On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when some one tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognized young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Bart's. ²⁰The sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man. ²¹In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now I hailed him with enthusiasm, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. ²²In the exuberance of my joy, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom.

²³"Whatever have you been doing with yourself, Watson?" he asked in undisguised wonder, as we rattled through the crowded London streets. ²⁴"You are as thin as a lath and as brown as a nut."

²⁵I gave him a short sketch of my adventures, and had hardly concluded it by the time that we reached our destination.

²⁶"Poor devil!" he said, commiseratingly, after he had listened to my misfortunes. ²⁷"What are you up to now?"

²⁸"Looking for lodgings," I answered. ²⁹"Trying to solve the problem as to whether it is possible to get comfortable rooms at a reasonable price."

³⁰"That's a strange thing," remarked my companion; "you are the second man to-day that has used that expression to me."

³¹"And who was the first?" I asked.

³²"A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital. ³³He was bemoaning himself this morning because he could not get someone to go halves with him in some nice rooms which he had found, and which were too much for his purse."

³⁴"By Jove!" I cried, "if he really wants someone to share the rooms and the expense, I am the very man for him. ³⁵I should prefer having a partner to being alone."

³⁶Young Stamford looked rather strangely at me over his wine-glass. ³⁷"You don't know Sherlock Holmes yet," he said; "perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion."

³⁸"Why, what is there against him?"

³⁹"Oh, I didn't say there was anything against him. ⁴⁰He is a little queer in his ideas—an enthusiast in some branches of science. ⁴¹As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough."

⁴²"A medical student, I suppose?" said I.

⁴³"No—I have no idea what he intends to go in for. ⁴⁴I believe he is well up in anatomy, and he is a first-class chemist; but, as far as I know, he has never taken out any systematic medical classes. ⁴⁵His studies are very desultory and eccentric, but he has amassed a lot of out-of-the way knowledge which would astonish his professors."

⁴⁶"Did you never ask him what he was going in for?" I asked.

⁴⁷"No; he is not a man that it is easy to draw out, though he can be communicative enough when the fancy seizes him."

⁴⁸"I should like to meet him," I said. ⁴⁹"If I am to lodge with anyone, I should prefer a man of studious and quiet habits. ⁵⁰I am not strong enough yet to stand much noise or excitement. ⁵¹I had enough of both in Afghanistan to last me for the remainder of my natural existence. ⁵²How could I meet this friend of yours?"

⁵³"He is sure to be at the laboratory," returned my companion. ⁵⁴"He either avoids the place for weeks, or else he works there from morning to night. ⁵⁵If you like, we shall drive round together after luncheon."

⁵⁶“Certainly,” I answered, and the conversation drifted away into other channels.

⁵⁷As we made our way to the hospital after leaving the Holborn, Stamford gave me a few more particulars about the gentleman whom I proposed to take as a fellow-lodger.

⁵⁸“You mustn't blame me if you don't get on with him,” he said; “I know nothing more of him than I have learned from meeting him occasionally in the laboratory. ⁵⁹You proposed this arrangement, so you must not hold me responsible.”

⁶⁰“If we don't get on it will be easy to part company,” I answered. ⁶¹“It seems to me, Stamford,” I added, looking hard at my companion, “that you have some reason for washing your hands of the matter. ⁶²Is this fellow's temper so formidable, or what is it? ⁶³Don't be mealy-mouthed about it.”

⁶⁴“It is not easy to express the inexpressible,” he answered with a laugh. ⁶⁵“Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes—it approaches to cold-bloodedness. ⁶⁶I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. ⁶⁷To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness. ⁶⁸He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge.”

⁶⁹“Very right too.”

⁷⁰“Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. ⁷¹When it comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape.”

⁷²“Beating the subjects!”

⁷³“Yes, to verify how far bruises may be produced after death. ⁷⁴I saw him at it with my own eyes.”

⁷⁵“And yet you say he is not a medical student?”

⁷⁶“No. ⁷⁷Heaven knows what the objects of his studies are. ⁷⁸But here we are, and you must form your own impressions about him.” ⁷⁹As he spoke, we turned down a narrow lane and passed through a small side-door, which opened into a wing of the great hospital. ⁸⁰It was familiar ground to me, and I needed no guiding as we ascended the bleak stone staircase and made our way down the long corridor with its vista of whitewashed wall and dun-coloured doors. ⁸¹Near the further end a low arched passage branched away from it and led to the chemical laboratory.

⁸²This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. ⁸³Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames. ⁸⁴There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. ⁸⁵At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. ⁸⁶“I've found it! ⁸⁷I've found it,” he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. ⁸⁸“I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by hæmoglobin, and by nothing else.” ⁸⁹Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

⁹⁰“Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said Stamford, introducing us.

⁹¹“How are you?” he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should hardly have given him credit. ⁹²“You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.”

⁹³“How on earth did you know that?” I asked in astonishment.

⁹⁴“Never mind,” said he, chuckling to himself. ⁹⁵“The question now is about hæmoglobin. ⁹⁶No doubt you see the significance of this discovery of mine?”

⁹⁷“It is interesting, chemically, no doubt,” I answered, “but practically—”

⁹⁸“Why, man, it is the most practical medico-legal discovery for years. ⁹⁹Don't you see that it gives us an infallible test for blood stains. ¹⁰⁰Come over here now!” ¹⁰¹He seized me by the coat-sleeve in his eagerness, and drew me over to the table at which he had been working. ¹⁰²“Let us have some fresh blood,” he said, digging a long bodkin into his finger, and drawing off the resulting drop of blood in a chemical pipette. ¹⁰³“Now, I add this small quantity of blood to a litre of water. ¹⁰⁴You perceive that the resulting mixture has the appearance of pure water. ¹⁰⁵The proportion of blood cannot be more than one in a million. ¹⁰⁶I have no doubt, however, that we shall be able to obtain the characteristic reaction.” ¹⁰⁷As he spoke, he threw into the vessel a few white crystals, and then added some drops of a transparent fluid. ¹⁰⁸In an instant the contents assumed a dull mahogany colour, and a brownish dust was precipitated to the bottom of the glass jar.

¹⁰⁹“Ha! ha!” he cried, clapping his hands, and looking as delighted as a child with a new toy. ¹¹⁰“What do you think of that?”

¹¹¹“It seems to be a very delicate test,” I remarked.

¹¹²“Beautiful! beautiful! The old Guaiacum test was very clumsy and uncertain. ¹¹³So is the microscopic examination for blood corpuscles. ¹¹⁴The latter is valueless if the stains are a few hours old. ¹¹⁵Now, this appears to act as well whether the blood is old or new. ¹¹⁶Had this test been invented, there are hundreds of men now walking the earth who would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes.”

¹¹⁷“Indeed!” I murmured.

¹¹⁸“Criminal cases are continually hinging upon that one point. ¹¹⁹A man is suspected of a crime months perhaps after it has been committed. ¹²⁰His linen or clothes are examined, and brownish stains discovered upon them. ¹²¹Are they blood stains, or mud stains, or rust stains, or fruit stains, or what are they? ¹²²That is a question which has puzzled many an expert, and why? ¹²³Because there was no reliable test. ¹²⁴Now we have the Sherlock Holmes' test, and there will no longer be any difficulty.”

¹²⁵His eyes fairly glittered as he spoke, and he put his hand over his heart and bowed as if to some applauding crowd conjured up by his imagination.

¹²⁶“You are to be congratulated,” I remarked, considerably surprised at his enthusiasm.

¹²⁷“There was the case of Von Bischoff at Frankfort last year. ¹²⁸He would certainly have been hung had this test been in existence. ¹²⁹Then there was Mason of Bradford, and the notorious Muller, and Lefevre of Montpellier, and Samson of new Orleans. ¹³⁰I could name a score of cases in which it would have been decisive.”

¹³¹“You seem to be a walking calendar of crime,” said Stamford with a laugh. ¹³²“You might start a paper on those lines. ¹³³Call it the ‘Police News of the Past.’”

¹³⁴“Very interesting reading it might be made, too,” remarked Sherlock Holmes, sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger. ¹³⁵“I have to be careful,” he continued, turning to me with a smile, “for I dabble with poisons a good deal.” ¹³⁶He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was all mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids.

¹³⁷“We came here on business,” said Stamford, sitting down on a high three-legged stool, and pushing another one in my direction with his foot. ¹³⁸“My friend here wants to take diggings, and as you were complaining that you could get no one to go halves with you, I thought that I had better bring you together.”

¹³⁹Sherlock Holmes seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me. ¹⁴⁰“I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street,” he said, “which would suit us down to the ground. ¹⁴¹You don't mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?”

¹⁴²“I always smoke ‘ship’s’ myself,” I answered.

¹⁴³“That’s good enough. ¹⁴⁴I generally have chemicals about, and occasionally do experiments. ¹⁴⁵Would that annoy you?”

¹⁴⁶“By no means.”

¹⁴⁷“Let me see—what are my other shortcomings. ¹⁴⁸I get in the dumps at times, and don’t open my mouth for days on end. ¹⁴⁹You must not think I am sulky when I do that. ¹⁵⁰Just let me alone, and I’ll soon be right. ¹⁵¹What have you to confess now? ¹⁵²It’s just as well for two fellows to know the worst of one another before they begin to live together.”

¹⁵³I laughed at this cross-examination. ¹⁵⁴“I keep a bull pup,” I said, “and I object to rows because my nerves are shaken, and I get up at all sorts of ungodly hours, and I am extremely lazy. ¹⁵⁵I have another set of vices when I’m well, but those are the principal ones at present.”

¹⁵⁶“Do you include violin-playing in your category of rows?” he asked, anxiously.

¹⁵⁷“It depends on the player,” I answered. ¹⁵⁸“A well-played violin is a treat for the gods—a badly-played one—”

¹⁵⁹“Oh, that’s all right,” he cried, with a merry laugh. ¹⁶⁰“I think we may consider the thing as settled—that is, if the rooms are agreeable to you.”

¹⁶¹“When shall we see them?”

¹⁶²“Call for me here at noon to-morrow, and we’ll go together and settle everything,” he answered.

¹⁶³“All right—noon exactly,” said I, shaking his hand.

¹⁶⁴We left him working among his chemicals, and we walked together towards my hotel.

¹⁶⁵“By the way,” I asked suddenly, stopping and turning upon Stamford, “how the deuce did he know that I had come from Afghanistan?”

¹⁶⁶My companion smiled an enigmatical smile. ¹⁶⁷“That’s just his little peculiarity,” he said. ¹⁶⁸“A good many people have wanted to know how he finds things out.”

¹⁷⁰“Oh! a mystery is it?” I cried, rubbing my hands. ¹⁷¹“This is very piquant. ¹⁷²I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. ¹⁷³‘The proper study of mankind is man,’ you know.”

¹⁷⁴“You must study him, then,” Stamford said, as he bade me good-bye. ¹⁷⁵“You’ll find him a knotty problem, though. ¹⁷⁶I’ll wager he learns more about you than you about him. ¹⁷⁷Good-bye.”

¹⁷⁸“Good-bye,” I answered, and strolled on to my hotel, considerably interested in my new acquaintance.

Chapter II.

The Science Of Deduction

¹We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221b, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting. ²They consisted of a couple of comfortable bed-rooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. ³So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. ⁴That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. ⁵For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. ⁶That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

⁷Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. ⁸He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. ⁹It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. ¹⁰Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the City. ¹¹Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. ¹²On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.

¹³As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life, gradually deepened and increased. ¹⁴His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. ¹⁵In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. ¹⁶His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. ¹⁷His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. ¹⁸His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments.

¹⁹The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. ²⁰Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered, how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. ²¹My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. ²²Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it.

²³He was not studying medicine. ²⁴He had himself, in reply to a question, confirmed Stamford's opinion upon that point. ²⁵Neither did he appear to have pursued any course of reading which might fit him for a degree in science or any other recognized portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world. ²⁶Yet his zeal for certain studies was remarkable, and within eccentric limits his knowledge was so extraordinarily ample and minute that his observations have fairly astounded me. ²⁷Surely no man would work so hard or attain such precise information unless he had some definite end in view. ²⁸Desultory readers are seldom remarkable for the exactness of their learning. ²⁹No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so.

³⁰His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. ³¹Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. ³²Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle, he inquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. ³³My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. ³⁴That any civilized human being in this nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realize it.

³⁵“You appear to be astonished,” he said, smiling at my expression of surprise. ³⁶“Now that I do know it I shall do my best to forget it.”

³⁷“To forget it!”

³⁸“You see,” he explained, “I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. ³⁹A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. ⁴⁰Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. ⁴¹He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. ⁴²It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. ⁴³Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. ⁴⁴It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.”

⁴⁵“But the Solar System!” I protested.

⁴⁶“What the deuce is it to me?” he interrupted impatiently; “you say that we go round the sun. ⁴⁷If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work.”

⁴⁸I was on the point of asking him what that work might be, but something in his manner showed me that the question would be an unwelcome one. ⁴⁹I pondered over our short conversation, however, and endeavoured to draw my deductions from it. ⁵⁰He said that he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. ⁵¹Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him. ⁵²I enumerated in my own mind all the various points upon which he had shown me that he was exceptionally well-informed. ⁵³I even took a pencil and jotted them down. ⁵⁴I could not help smiling at the document when I had completed it. ⁵⁵It ran in this way—

⁵⁶Knowledge of Literature.—Nil.

⁵⁷Philosophy.—Nil.

⁵⁸Astronomy.—Nil.

⁵⁹Politics.—Feeble.

⁶⁰Botany.—Variable. ⁶¹Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. ⁶²Knows nothing of practical gardening.

⁶³Geology.—Practical, but limited. ⁶⁴Tells at a glance different soils from each other. ⁶⁵After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.

⁶⁶Chemistry.—Profound.

⁶⁷Anatomy.—Accurate, but unsystematic.

⁶⁸Sensational Literature.—Immense. ⁶⁹He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.

⁷⁰Plays the violin well.

⁷¹Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.

⁷²Has a good practical knowledge of British law.

⁷³When I had got so far in my list I threw it into the fire in despair. ⁷⁴“If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all,” I said to myself, “I may as well give up the attempt at once.”

⁷⁵I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. ⁷⁶These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. ⁷⁷That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's Lieder, and other favourites. ⁷⁸When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air. ⁷⁹Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. ⁸⁰Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. ⁸¹Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. ⁸²Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine. ⁸³I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favourite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience.

⁸⁴During the first week or so we had no callers, and I had begun to think that my companion was as friendless a man as I was myself. ⁸⁵Presently, however, I found that he had many acquaintances, and those in the most different classes of society. ⁸⁶There was one little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow who was introduced to me as Mr. Lestrade, and who came three or four times in a single week. ⁸⁷One morning a young girl called, fashionably dressed, and stayed for half an hour or more. ⁸⁸The same afternoon brought a grey-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew pedlar, who appeared to me to be much excited, and who was closely followed by a slipshod elderly woman. ⁸⁹On another occasion an old white-haired gentleman had an interview with my companion; and on another a railway porter in his velveteen uniform. ⁹⁰When any of these nondescript individuals put in an appearance, Sherlock Holmes used to beg for the use of the sitting-room, and I would retire to my bed-room. ⁹¹He always apologized to me for putting me to this inconvenience. ⁹²“I have to use this room as a place of business,” he said, “and these people are my clients.” ⁹³Again I had an opportunity of asking him a point blank question, and again my delicacy prevented me from forcing another man to confide in me. ⁹⁴I imagined at the time that he had some strong reason for not alluding to it, but he soon dispelled the idea by coming round to the subject of his own accord.

⁹⁵It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast. ⁹⁶The landlady had become so accustomed to my late habits that my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. ⁹⁷With the unreasonable petulance of mankind I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. ⁹⁸Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast. ⁹⁹One of the articles had a pencil mark at the heading, and I naturally began to run my eye through it.

¹⁰⁰Its somewhat ambitious title was “The Book of Life,” and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. ¹⁰¹It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. ¹⁰²The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. ¹⁰³The writer claimed by a momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man's inmost thoughts. ¹⁰⁴Deceit, according to him, was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. ¹⁰⁵His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid. ¹⁰⁶So startling would

his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.

¹⁰⁷“From a drop of water,” said the writer, “a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. ¹⁰⁸So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. ¹⁰⁹Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. ¹¹⁰Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. ¹¹¹Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. ¹¹²Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. ¹¹³By a man's finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs—by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. ¹¹⁴That all united should fail to enlighten the competent enquirer in any case is almost inconceivable.”

¹¹⁵“What ineffable twaddle!” I cried, slapping the magazine down on the table, “I never read such rubbish in my life.”

¹¹⁶“What is it?” asked Sherlock Holmes.

¹¹⁷“Why, this article,” I said, pointing at it with my egg spoon as I sat down to my breakfast. ¹¹⁸“I see that you have read it since you have marked it. ¹¹⁹I don't deny that it is smartly written. ¹²⁰It irritates me though. ¹²¹It is evidently the theory of some arm-chair lounge who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. ¹²²It is not practical. ¹²³I should like to see him clapped down in a third class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers. ¹²⁴I would lay a thousand to one against him.”

¹²⁵“You would lose your money,” Sherlock Holmes remarked calmly. ¹²⁶“As for the article I wrote it myself.”

¹²⁷“You!”

¹²⁸“Yes, I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. ¹²⁹The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical are really extremely practical—so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese.”

¹³⁰“And how?” I asked involuntarily.

¹³¹“Well, I have a trade of my own. ¹³²I suppose I am the only one in the world. ¹³³I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. ¹³⁴Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. ¹³⁵When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. ¹³⁶They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. ¹³⁷There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first. ¹³⁸Lestrade is a well-known detective. ¹³⁹He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here.”

¹⁴⁰“And these other people?”

¹⁴¹“They are mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies. ¹⁴²They are all people who are in trouble about something, and want a little enlightening. ¹⁴³I listen to their story, they listen to my comments, and then I pocket my fee.”

¹⁴⁴“But do you mean to say,” I said, “that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?”

¹⁴⁵“Quite so. I have a kind of intuition that way. ¹⁴⁶Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. ¹⁴⁷Then I have to bustle about and see things with my own eyes. ¹⁴⁸You see I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully. ¹⁴⁹Those rules of deduction laid down in that article which aroused your scorn, are invaluable to me in practical work. ¹⁵⁰Observation with me is second nature. ¹⁵¹You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan.”

¹⁵²“You were told, no doubt.”

¹⁵³“Nothing of the sort. I knew you came from Afghanistan. ¹⁵⁴From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. ¹⁵⁵There were such steps, however. ¹⁵⁶The train of reasoning ran, ‘Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. ¹⁵⁷Clearly an army doctor, then. ¹⁵⁸He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. ¹⁵⁹He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. ¹⁶⁰His left arm has been injured. ¹⁶¹He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. ¹⁶²Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? ¹⁶³Clearly in Afghanistan.’ ¹⁶⁴The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. ¹⁶⁵I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished.”

¹⁶⁶“It is simple enough as you explain it,” I said, smiling. ¹⁶⁷“You remind me of Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin. ¹⁶⁸I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories.”

¹⁶⁹Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. ¹⁷⁰“No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,” he observed. ¹⁷¹“Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. ¹⁷²That trick of his of breaking in on his friends' thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour's silence is really very showy and superficial. ¹⁷³He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.”

¹⁷⁴“Have you read Gaboriau's works?” I asked. ¹⁷⁵“Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?”

¹⁷⁶Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. ¹⁷⁷“Lecoq was a miserable bungler,” he said, in an angry voice; “he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. ¹⁷⁸That book made me positively ill. ¹⁷⁹The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. ¹⁸⁰I could have done it in twenty-four hours. ¹⁸¹Lecoq took six months or so. ¹⁸²It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid.”

¹⁸³I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. ¹⁸⁴I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. ¹⁸⁵“This fellow may be very clever,” I said to myself, “but he is certainly very conceited.”

¹⁸⁶“There are no crimes and no criminals in these days,” he said, querulously. ¹⁸⁷“What is the use of having brains in our profession? ¹⁸⁸I know well that I have it in me to make my name famous. ¹⁸⁹No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done. ¹⁹⁰And what is the result? ¹⁹¹There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villany with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it.”

¹⁹²I was still annoyed at his bumptious style of conversation. ¹⁹³I thought it best to change the topic.

¹⁹⁴“I wonder what that fellow is looking for?” I asked, pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers. ¹⁹⁵He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of a message.

¹⁹⁶“You mean the retired sergeant of Marines,” said Sherlock Holmes.

¹⁹⁷“Brag and bounce!” thought I to myself. ¹⁹⁸“He knows that I cannot verify his guess.”

¹⁹⁹The thought had hardly passed through my mind when the man whom we were watching caught sight of the number on our door, and ran rapidly across the roadway. ²⁰⁰We heard a loud knock, a deep voice below, and heavy steps ascending the stair.

²⁰¹“For Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said, stepping into the room and handing my friend the letter.

²⁰²Here was an opportunity of taking the conceit out of him. ²⁰³He little thought of this when he made that random shot. ²⁰⁴“May I ask, my lad,” I said, in the blandest voice, “what your trade may be?”

²⁰⁵“Commissionaire, sir,” he said, gruffly. ²⁰⁶“Uniform away for repairs.”

²⁰⁷“And you were?” I asked, with a slightly malicious glance at my companion.

²⁰⁸“A sergeant, sir, Royal Marine Light Infantry, sir. ²⁰⁹No answer? ²¹⁰Right, sir.”

²¹¹He clicked his heels together, raised his hand in a salute, and was gone.

Chapter III.

The Lauriston Garden Mystery

¹I confess that I was considerably startled by this fresh proof of the practical nature of my companion's theories. ²My respect for his powers of analysis increased wondrously. ³There still remained some lurking suspicion in my mind, however, that the whole thing was a pre-arranged episode, intended to dazzle me, though what earthly object he could have in taking me in was past my comprehension. ⁴When I looked at him he had finished reading the note, and his eyes had assumed the vacant, lack-lustre expression which showed mental abstraction.

⁵"How in the world did you deduce that?" I asked.

⁶"Deduce what?" said he, petulantly.

⁷"Why, that he was a retired sergeant of Marines."

⁸"I have no time for trifles," he answered, brusquely; then with a smile, "Excuse my rudeness. ⁹You broke the thread of my thoughts; but perhaps it is as well. ¹⁰So you actually were not able to see that that man was a sergeant of Marines?"

¹¹"No, indeed."

¹²"It was easier to know it than to explain why I knew it. ¹³If you were asked to prove that two and two made four, you might find some difficulty, and yet you are quite sure of the fact. ¹⁴Even across the street I could see a great blue anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow's hand. ¹⁵That smacked of the sea. ¹⁶He had a military carriage, however, and regulation side whiskers. ¹⁷There we have the marine. ¹⁸He was a man with some amount of self-importance and a certain air of command. ¹⁹You must have observed the way in which he held his head and swung his cane. ²⁰A steady, respectable, middle-aged man, too, on the face of him—all facts which led me to believe that he had been a sergeant."

²¹"Wonderful!" I ejaculated.

²²"Commonplace," said Holmes, though I thought from his expression that he was pleased at my evident surprise and admiration. ²⁴"I said just now that there were no criminals. ²⁵It appears that I am wrong—look at this!" ²⁶He threw me over the note which the commissioner had brought.

²⁷"Why," I cried, as I cast my eye over it, "this is terrible!"

²⁸"It does seem to be a little out of the common," he remarked, calmly. ²⁹"Would you mind reading it to me aloud?"

³⁰This is the letter which I read to him—

³¹"My dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes:

³²"There has been a bad business during the night at 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. ³³Our man on the beat saw a light there about two in the morning, and as the house was an empty one, suspected that something was amiss. ³⁴He found the door open, and in the front room, which is bare of furniture, discovered the body of a gentleman, well dressed, and having cards in his pocket bearing the name of 'Enoch J. Drebbler, Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A.' ³⁵There had been no robbery, nor is there any evidence as to how the man met his death. ³⁶There are marks of blood in the room, but there is no wound upon his person. ³⁷We are at a loss as to how he came into the empty house; indeed, the whole affair is a puzzler. ³⁸If you can come round to the house any time before twelve, you will find me there. ³⁹I have

left everything in statu quo until I hear from you. ⁴⁰If you are unable to come I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if you would favour me with your opinion.

⁴¹“Yours faithfully,

⁴²“Tobias Gregson.”

⁴³“Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders,” my friend remarked; “he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. ⁴⁴They are both quick and energetic, but conventional—shockingly so. ⁴⁵They have their knives into one another, too. ⁴⁶They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. ⁴⁷There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent.”

⁴⁸I was amazed at the calm way in which he rippled on. ⁴⁹“Surely there is not a moment to be lost,” I cried, “shall I go and order you a cab?”

⁵⁰“I’m not sure about whether I shall go. ⁵¹I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever stood in shoe leather—that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times.”

⁵²“Why, it is just such a chance as you have been longing for.”

⁵³“My dear fellow, what does it matter to me. ⁵⁴Supposing I unravel the whole matter, you may be sure that Gregson, Lestrade, and Co. will pocket all the credit. ⁵⁵That comes of being an unofficial personage.”

⁵⁶“But he begs you to help him.”

⁵⁷“Yes. ⁵⁸He knows that I am his superior, and acknowledges it to me; but he would cut his tongue out before he would own it to any third person. ⁵⁹However, we may as well go and have a look. ⁶⁰I shall work it out on my own hook. ⁶¹I may have a laugh at them if I have nothing else. ⁶²Come on!”

⁶³He hustled on his overcoat, and bustled about in a way that showed that an energetic fit had superseded the apathetic one.

⁶⁴“Get your hat,” he said.

⁶⁵“You wish me to come?”

⁶⁶“Yes, if you have nothing better to do.” ⁶⁷A minute later we were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road.

⁶⁸It was a foggy, cloudy morning, and a dun-coloured veil hung over the house-tops, looking like the reflection of the mud-coloured streets beneath. ⁶⁹My companion was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati. ⁷⁰As for myself, I was silent, for the dull weather and the melancholy business upon which we were engaged, depressed my spirits.

⁷¹“You don’t seem to give much thought to the matter in hand,” I said at last, interrupting Holmes’ musical disquisition.

⁷²“No data yet,” he answered. ⁷³“It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. ⁷⁴It biases the judgment.”

⁷⁵“You will have your data soon,” I remarked, pointing with my finger; “this is the Brixton Road, and that is the house, if I am not very much mistaken.”

⁷⁶“So it is. Stop, driver, stop!” ⁷⁷We were still a hundred yards or so from it, but he insisted upon our alighting, and we finished our journey upon foot.

⁷⁸Number 3, Lauriston Gardens wore an ill-omened and minatory look. ⁷⁹It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. ⁸⁰The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a "To Let" card had developed like a cataract upon the bleared panes. ⁸¹A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in colour, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and of gravel. ⁸²The whole place was very sloppy from the rain which had fallen through the night. ⁸³The garden was bounded by a three-foot brick wall with a fringe of wood rails upon the top, and against this wall was leaning a stalwart police constable, surrounded by a small knot of loafers, who craned their necks and strained their eyes in the vain hope of catching some glimpse of the proceedings within.

⁸⁴I had imagined that Sherlock Holmes would at once have hurried into the house and plunged into a study of the mystery. ⁸⁵Nothing appeared to be further from his intention. ⁸⁶With an air of nonchalance which, under the circumstances, seemed to me to border upon affectation, he lounged up and down the pavement, and gazed vacantly at the ground, the sky, the opposite houses and the line of railings. ⁸⁷Having finished his scrutiny, he proceeded slowly down the path, or rather down the fringe of grass which flanked the path, keeping his eyes riveted upon the ground. ⁸⁸Twice he stopped, and once I saw him smile, and heard him utter an exclamation of satisfaction. ⁸⁹There were many marks of footsteps upon the wet clayey soil, but since the police had been coming and going over it, I was unable to see how my companion could hope to learn anything from it. ⁹⁰Still I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me.

⁹¹At the door of the house we were met by a tall, white-faced, flaxen-haired man, with a notebook in his hand, who rushed forward and wrung my companion's hand with effusion. ⁹²"It is indeed kind of you to come," he said, "I have had everything left untouched."

⁹³"Except that!" my friend answered, pointing at the pathway. ⁹⁴"If a herd of buffaloes had passed along there could not be a greater mess. ⁹⁵No doubt, however, you had drawn your own conclusions, Gregson, before you permitted this."

⁹⁶"I have had so much to do inside the house," the detective said evasively. ⁹⁷"My colleague, Mr. Lestrade, is here. ⁹⁸I had relied upon him to look after this."

⁹⁹Holmes glanced at me and raised his eyebrows sardonically. ¹⁰⁰"With two such men as yourself and Lestrade upon the ground, there will not be much for a third party to find out," he said.

¹⁰¹Gregson rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied way. ¹⁰²"I think we have done all that can be done," he answered; "it's a queer case though, and I knew your taste for such things."

¹⁰³"You did not come here in a cab?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

¹⁰⁴"No, sir."

¹⁰⁵"Nor Lestrade?"

¹⁰⁶"No, sir."

¹⁰⁷"Then let us go and look at the room." ¹⁰⁸With which inconsequent remark he strode on into the house, followed by Gregson, whose features expressed his astonishment.

¹⁰⁹A short passage, bare planked and dusty, led to the kitchen and offices. ¹¹⁰Two doors opened out of it to the left and to the right. ¹¹¹One of these had obviously been closed for many weeks. ¹¹²The other belonged to the dining-room, which was the apartment in which the mysterious affair had occurred.

¹¹³Holmes walked in, and I followed him with that subdued feeling at my heart which the presence of death inspires.

¹¹⁴It was a large square room, looking all the larger from the absence of all furniture. ¹¹⁵A vulgar flaring paper adorned the walls, but it was blotched in places with mildew, and here and there great strips had become detached and hung down, exposing the yellow plaster beneath. ¹¹⁶Opposite the door was a showy fireplace, surmounted by a mantelpiece of imitation white marble. ¹¹⁷On one corner of this was stuck the stump of a red wax candle. ¹¹⁸The solitary window was so dirty that the light was hazy and uncertain, giving a dull grey tinge to everything, which was intensified by the thick layer of dust which coated the whole apartment.

¹¹⁹All these details I observed afterwards. ¹²⁰At present my attention was centred upon the single grim motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards, with vacant sightless eyes staring up at the discoloured ceiling. ¹²¹It was that of a man about forty-three or forty-four years of age, middle-sized, broad shouldered, with crisp curling black hair, and a short stubbly beard. ¹²²He was dressed in a heavy broadcloth frock coat and waistcoat, with light-coloured trousers, and immaculate collar and cuffs. ¹²³A top hat, well brushed and trim, was placed upon the floor beside him. ¹²⁴His hands were clenched and his arms thrown abroad, while his lower limbs were interlocked as though his death struggle had been a grievous one. ¹²⁵On his rigid face there stood an expression of horror, and as it seemed to me, of hatred, such as I have never seen upon human features. ¹²⁶This malignant and terrible contortion, combined with the low forehead, blunt nose, and prognathous jaw gave the dead man a singularly simious and ape-like appearance, which was increased by his writhing, unnatural posture. ¹²⁷I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark grimy apartment, which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London.

¹²⁸Lestrade, lean and ferret-like as ever, was standing by the doorway, and greeted my companion and myself.

¹²⁹"This case will make a stir, sir," he remarked. ¹³⁰"It beats anything I have seen, and I am no chicken."

¹³¹"There is no clue?" said Gregson.

¹³²"None at all," chimed in Lestrade.

¹³³Sherlock Holmes approached the body, and, kneeling down, examined it intently. ¹³⁴"You are sure that there is no wound?" he asked, pointing to numerous gouts and splashes of blood which lay all round.

¹³⁵"Positive!" cried both detectives.

¹³⁶"Then, of course, this blood belongs to a second individual—presumably the murderer, if murder has been committed. ¹³⁷It reminds me of the circumstances attendant on the death of Van Jansen, in Utrecht, in the year '34. ¹³⁸Do you remember the case, Gregson?"

¹³⁹"No, sir."

¹⁴⁰"Read it up—you really should. ¹⁴¹There is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁴²It has all been done before."

¹⁴³As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same far-away expression which I have already remarked upon. ¹⁴⁴So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted. ¹⁴⁵Finally, he sniffed the dead man's lips, and then glanced at the soles of his patent leather boots.

¹⁴⁶"He has not been moved at all?" he asked.

¹⁴⁷"No more than was necessary for the purposes of our examination."

¹⁴⁸"You can take him to the mortuary now," he said. ¹⁴⁹"There is nothing more to be learned."

¹⁵⁰Gregson had a stretcher and four men at hand. ¹⁵¹At his call they entered the room, and the stranger was lifted and carried out. ¹⁵²As they raised him, a ring tinkled down and rolled across the floor. ¹⁵³Lestrade grabbed it up and stared at it with mystified eyes.

¹⁵⁴"There's been a woman here," he cried. ¹⁵⁵"It's a woman's wedding-ring."

¹⁵⁶He held it out, as he spoke, upon the palm of his hand. ¹⁵⁷We all gathered round him and gazed at it. ¹⁵⁸There could be no doubt that that circlet of plain gold had once adorned the finger of a bride.

¹⁵⁹"This complicates matters," said Gregson. ¹⁶⁰"Heaven knows, they were complicated enough before."

¹⁶¹"You're sure it doesn't simplify them?" observed Holmes. ¹⁶²"There's nothing to be learned by staring at it. ¹⁶³What did you find in his pockets?"

¹⁶⁴"We have it all here," said Gregson, pointing to a litter of objects upon one of the bottom steps of the stairs. ¹⁶⁵"A gold watch, No. 97163, by Barraud, of London. ¹⁶⁶Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. ¹⁶⁷Gold ring, with masonic device. ¹⁶⁸Gold pin—bull-dog's head, with rubies as eyes. ¹⁶⁹Russian leather card-case, with cards of Enoch J. Drebber of Cleveland, corresponding with the E. J. D. upon the linen. ¹⁷⁰No purse, but loose money to the extent of seven pounds thirteen. ¹⁷¹Pocket edition of Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the fly-leaf. ¹⁷²Two letters—one addressed to E. J. Drebber and one to Joseph Stangerson."

¹⁷³"At what address?"

¹⁷⁴"American Exchange, Strand—to be left till called for. ¹⁷⁵They are both from the Guion Steamship Company, and refer to the sailing of their boats from Liverpool. ¹⁷⁶It is clear that this unfortunate man was about to return to New York."

¹⁷⁷"Have you made any inquiries as to this man, Stangerson?"

¹⁷⁸"I did it at once, sir," said Gregson. ¹⁷⁹"I have had advertisements sent to all the newspapers, and one of my men has gone to the American Exchange, but he has not returned yet."

¹⁸⁰"Have you sent to Cleveland?"

¹⁸¹"We telegraphed this morning."

¹⁸²"How did you word your inquiries?"

¹⁸³"We simply detailed the circumstances, and said that we should be glad of any information which could help us."

¹⁸⁴"You did not ask for particulars on any point which appeared to you to be crucial?"

¹⁸⁵"I asked about Stangerson."

¹⁸⁶"Nothing else? ¹⁸⁷Is there no circumstance on which this whole case appears to hinge? ¹⁸⁸Will you not telegraph again?"

¹⁸⁹"I have said all I have to say," said Gregson, in an offended voice.

¹⁹⁰Sherlock Holmes chuckled to himself, and appeared to be about to make some remark, when Lestrade, who had been in the front room while we were holding this conversation in the hall, reappeared upon the scene, rubbing his hands in a pompous and self-satisfied manner.

¹⁹¹"Mr. Gregson," he said, "I have just made a discovery of the highest importance, and one which would have been overlooked had I not made a careful examination of the walls."

¹⁹²The little man's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and he was evidently in a state of suppressed exultation at having scored a point against his colleague.

¹⁹³"Come here," he said, bustling back into the room, the atmosphere of which felt clearer since the removal of its ghastly inmate. ¹⁹⁴"Now, stand there!"

¹⁹⁵He struck a match on his boot and held it up against the wall.

¹⁹⁶"Look at that!" he said, triumphantly.

¹⁹⁷I have remarked that the paper had fallen away in parts. ¹⁹⁸In this particular corner of the room a large piece had peeled off, leaving a yellow square of coarse plastering. ¹⁹⁹Across this bare space there was scrawled in blood-red letters a single word—

²⁰⁰RACHE.

²⁰¹"What do you think of that?" cried the detective, with the air of a showman exhibiting his show.

²⁰²"This was overlooked because it was in the darkest corner of the room, and no one thought of looking there. ²⁰³The murderer has written it with his or her own blood. ²⁰⁴See this smear where it has trickled down the wall! ²⁰⁵That disposes of the idea of suicide anyhow. ²⁰⁶Why was that corner chosen to write it on? ²⁰⁷I will tell you. ²⁰⁸See that candle on the mantelpiece. ²⁰⁹It was lit at the time, and if it was lit this corner would be the brightest instead of the darkest portion of the wall."

²¹⁰"And what does it mean now that you have found it?" asked Gregson in a depreciatory voice.

²¹¹"Mean? ²¹²Why, it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish. ²¹³You mark my words, when this case comes to be cleared up you will find that a woman named Rachel has something to do with it. ²¹⁴It's all very well for you to laugh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ²¹⁵You may be very smart and clever, but the old hound is the best, when all is said and done."

²¹⁶"I really beg your pardon!" said my companion, who had ruffled the little man's temper by bursting into an explosion of laughter. ²¹⁷"You certainly have the credit of being the first of us to find this out, and, as you say, it bears every mark of having been written by the other participant in last night's mystery. ²¹⁸I have not had time to examine this room yet, but with your permission I shall do so now."

²¹⁹As he spoke, he whipped a tape measure and a large round magnifying glass from his pocket. ²²⁰With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. ²²¹So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. ²²²As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded well-trained foxhound as it dashes backwards and forwards through the covert, whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent. ²²³For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. ²²⁴In one place he gathered up very carefully a little pile of grey dust from the floor, and packed it away in an envelope. ²²⁵Finally, he examined with his glass the word upon the wall, going over every letter of it with the most minute exactness. ²²⁶This done, he appeared to be satisfied, for he replaced his tape and his glass in his pocket.

²²⁷"They say that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains," he remarked with a smile. ²²⁸"It's a very bad definition, but it does apply to detective work."

²²⁹Gregson and Lestrade had watched the manœuvres of their amateur companion with considerable curiosity and some contempt. ²³⁰They evidently failed to appreciate the fact, which I had begun to

realize, that Sherlock Holmes' smallest actions were all directed towards some definite and practical end.

²³¹“What do you think of it, sir?” they both asked.

²³²“It would be robbing you of the credit of the case if I was to presume to help you,” remarked my friend. ²³³“You are doing so well now that it would be a pity for anyone to interfere.” ²³⁴There was a world of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke. ²³⁵“If you will let me know how your investigations go,” he continued, “I shall be happy to give you any help I can. ²³⁶In the meantime I should like to speak to the constable who found the body. ²³⁷Can you give me his name and address?”

²³⁸Lestrade glanced at his note-book. ²³⁹“John Rance,” he said. ²⁴⁰“He is off duty now. ²⁴¹You will find him at 46, Audley Court, Kennington Park Gate.”

²⁴²Holmes took a note of the address.

²⁴³“Come along, Doctor,” he said; “we shall go and look him up. ²⁴⁴I’ll tell you one thing which may help you in the case,” he continued, turning to the two detectives. ²⁴⁵“There has been murder done, and the murderer was a man. ²⁴⁶He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. ²⁴⁷He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off fore leg. ²⁴⁸In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. ²⁴⁹These are only a few indications, but they may assist you.”

²⁵⁰Lestrade and Gregson glanced at each other with an incredulous smile.

²⁵¹“If this man was murdered, how was it done?” asked the former.

²⁵²“Poison,” said Sherlock Holmes curtly, and strode off. ²⁵³“One other thing, Lestrade,” he added, turning round at the door: “‘Rache,’ is the German for ‘revenge;’ so don’t lose your time looking for Miss Rachel.”

²⁵⁴With which Parthian shot he walked away, leaving the two rivals open-mouthed behind him.

Chapter IV.

What John Rance Had To Tell

¹It was one o'clock when we left No. 3, Lauriston Gardens. ²Sherlock Holmes led me to the nearest telegraph office, whence he dispatched a long telegram. ³He then hailed a cab, and ordered the driver to take us to the address given us by Lestrade.

⁴"There is nothing like first hand evidence," he remarked; "as a matter of fact, my mind is entirely made up upon the case, but still we may as well learn all that is to be learned."

⁵"You amaze me, Holmes," said I. ⁶"Surely you are not as sure as you pretend to be of all those particulars which you gave."

⁷"There's no room for a mistake," he answered. ⁸"The very first thing which I observed on arriving there was that a cab had made two ruts with its wheels close to the curb. ⁹Now, up to last night, we have had no rain for a week, so that those wheels which left such a deep impression must have been there during the night. ¹⁰There were the marks of the horse's hoofs, too, the outline of one of which was far more clearly cut than that of the other three, showing that that was a new shoe. ¹¹Since the cab was there after the rain began, and was not there at any time during the morning—I have Gregson's word for that—it follows that it must have been there during the night, and, therefore, that it brought those two individuals to the house."

¹²"That seems simple enough," said I; "but how about the other man's height?"

¹³"Why, the height of a man, in nine cases out of ten, can be told from the length of his stride. ¹⁴It is a simple calculation enough, though there is no use my boring you with figures. ¹⁵I had this fellow's stride both on the clay outside and on the dust within. ¹⁶Then I had a way of checking my calculation. ¹⁷When a man writes on a wall, his instinct leads him to write about the level of his own eyes. ¹⁸Now that writing was just over six feet from the ground. ¹⁹It was child's play."

²⁰"And his age?" I asked.

²¹"Well, if a man can stride four and a-half feet without the smallest effort, he can't be quite in the sere and yellow. ²²That was the breadth of a puddle on the garden walk which he had evidently walked across. ²³Patent-leather boots had gone round, and Square-toes had hopped over. ²⁴There is no mystery about it at all. ²⁵I am simply applying to ordinary life a few of those precepts of observation and deduction which I advocated in that article. ²⁶Is there anything else that puzzles you?"

²⁷"The finger nails and the Trichinopoly," I suggested.

²⁸"The writing on the wall was done with a man's forefinger dipped in blood. ²⁹My glass allowed me to observe that the plaster was slightly scratched in doing it, which would not have been the case if the man's nail had been trimmed. ³⁰I gathered up some scattered ash from the floor. ³¹It was dark in colour and flakey—such an ash as is only made by a Trichinopoly. ³²I have made a special study of cigar ashes—in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject. ³³I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand, either of cigar or of tobacco. ³⁴It is just in such details that the skilled detective differs from the Gregson and Lestrade type."

³⁵"And the florid face?" I asked.

³⁶"Ah, that was a more daring shot, though I have no doubt that I was right. ³⁷You must not ask me that at the present state of the affair."

³⁸I passed my hand over my brow. ³⁹“My head is in a whirl,” I remarked; “the more one thinks of it the more mysterious it grows. ⁴⁰How came these two men—if there were two men—into an empty house?

⁴¹What has become of the cabman who drove them? ⁴²How could one man compel another to take poison? ⁴³Where did the blood come from? ⁴⁴What was the object of the murderer, since robbery had no part in it? ⁴⁵How came the woman's ring there? ⁴⁶Above all, why should the second man write up the German word RACHE before decamping? ⁴⁷I confess that I cannot see any possible way of reconciling all these facts.”

⁴⁸My companion smiled approvingly.

⁴⁹“You sum up the difficulties of the situation succinctly and well,” he said. ⁵⁰“There is much that is still obscure, though I have quite made up my mind on the main facts. ⁵¹As to poor Lestrade's discovery it was simply a blind intended to put the police upon a wrong track, by suggesting Socialism and secret societies. ⁵²It was not done by a German. ⁵³The A, if you noticed, was printed somewhat after the German fashion. ⁵⁴Now, a real German invariably prints in the Latin character, so that we may safely say that this was not written by one, but by a clumsy imitator who overdid his part. ⁵⁵It was simply a ruse to divert inquiry into a wrong channel. ⁵⁶I'm not going to tell you much more of the case, Doctor. ⁵⁷You know a conjuror gets no credit when once he has explained his trick, and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual after all.”

⁵⁸“I shall never do that,” I answered; “you have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world.”

⁵⁹My companion flushed up with pleasure at my words, and the earnest way in which I uttered them. ⁶⁰I had already observed that he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty.

⁶¹“I'll tell you one other thing,” he said. ⁶²“Patent-leathers and Square-toes came in the same cab, and they walked down the pathway together as friendly as possible—arm-in-arm, in all probability. ⁶³When they got inside they walked up and down the room—or rather, Patent-leathers stood still while Square-toes walked up and down. ⁶⁴I could read all that in the dust; and I could read that as he walked he grew more and more excited. ⁶⁵That is shown by the increased length of his strides. ⁶⁶He was talking all the while, and working himself up, no doubt, into a fury. ⁶⁷Then the tragedy occurred. ⁶⁸I've told you all I know myself now, for the rest is mere surmise and conjecture. ⁶⁹We have a good working basis, however, on which to start. ⁷⁰We must hurry up, for I want to go to Halle's concert to hear Norman Neruda this afternoon.”

⁷¹This conversation had occurred while our cab had been threading its way through a long succession of dingy streets and dreary by-ways. ⁷²In the dingiest and dreariest of them our driver suddenly came to a stand. ⁷³“That's Audley Court in there,” he said, pointing to a narrow slit in the line of dead-coloured brick. ⁷⁴“You'll find me here when you come back.”

⁷⁵Audley Court was not an attractive locality. ⁷⁶The narrow passage led us into a quadrangle paved with flags and lined by sordid dwellings. ⁷⁷We picked our way among groups of dirty children, and through lines of discoloured linen, until we came to Number 46, the door of which was decorated with a small slip of brass on which the name Rance was engraved. ⁷⁸On enquiry we found that the constable was in bed, and we were shown into a little front parlour to await his coming.

⁷⁹He appeared presently, looking a little irritable at being disturbed in his slumbers. ⁸⁰“I made my report at the office,” he said.

⁸¹Holmes took a half-sovereign from his pocket and played with it pensively. ⁸²“We thought that we should like to hear it all from your own lips,” he said.

⁸³“I shall be most happy to tell you anything I can,” the constable answered with his eyes upon the little golden disk.

⁸⁴“Just let us hear it all in your own way as it occurred.”

⁸⁵Rance sat down on the horsehair sofa, and knitted his brows as though determined not to omit anything in his narrative.

⁸⁶“I’ll tell it ye from the beginning,” he said. ⁸⁷“My time is from ten at night to six in the morning. ⁸⁸At eleven there was a fight at the ‘White Hart’; but bar that all was quiet enough on the beat. ⁸⁹At one o’clock it began to rain, and I met Harry Murcher—him who has the Holland Grove beat—and we stood together at the corner of Henrietta Street a-talkin’. ⁹⁰Presently—maybe about two or a little after—I thought I would take a look round and see that all was right down the Brixton Road. ⁹¹It was precious dirty and lonely. ⁹²Not a soul did I meet all the way down, though a cab or two went past me. ⁹³I was a strollin’ down, thinkin’ between ourselves how uncommon handy a four of gin hot would be, when suddenly the glint of a light caught my eye in the window of that same house. ⁹⁴Now, I knew that them two houses in Lauriston Gardens was empty on account of him that owns them who won’t have the drains seed to, though the very last tenant what lived in one of them died o’ typhoid fever. ⁹⁵I was knocked all in a heap therefore at seeing a light in the window, and I suspected as something was wrong. ⁹⁶When I got to the door—”

⁹⁷“You stopped, and then walked back to the garden gate,” my companion interrupted. ⁹⁸“What did you do that for?”

⁹⁹Rance gave a violent jump, and stared at Sherlock Holmes with the utmost amazement upon his features.

¹⁰⁰“Why, that’s true, sir,” he said; “though how you come to know it, Heaven only knows. ¹⁰¹Ye see, when I got up to the door it was so still and so lonesome, that I thought I’d be none the worse for some one with me. ¹⁰²I ain’t afeared of anything on this side o’ the grave; but I thought that maybe it was him that died o’ the typhoid inspecting the drains what killed him. ¹⁰³The thought gave me a kind o’ turn, and I walked back to the gate to see if I could see Murcher’s lantern, but there wasn’t no sign of him nor of anyone else.”

¹⁰⁴“There was no one in the street?”

¹⁰⁵“Not a livin’ soul, sir, nor as much as a dog. ¹⁰⁶Then I pulled myself together and went back and pushed the door open. ¹⁰⁷All was quiet inside, so I went into the room where the light was a-burnin’. ¹⁰⁸There was a candle flickerin’ on the mantelpiece—a red wax one—and by its light I saw—”

¹⁰⁹“Yes, I know all that you saw. ¹¹⁰You walked round the room several times, and you knelt down by the body, and then you walked through and tried the kitchen door, and then—”

¹¹¹John Rance sprang to his feet with a frightened face and suspicion in his eyes. ¹¹²“Where was you hid to see all that?” he cried. ¹¹³“It seems to me that you knows a deal more than you should.”

¹¹⁴Holmes laughed and threw his card across the table to the constable. ¹¹⁵“Don’t get arresting me for the murder,” he said. ¹¹⁶“I am one of the hounds and not the wolf; Mr. Gregson or Mr. Lestrade will answer for that. ¹¹⁷Go on, though. ¹¹⁸What did you do next?”

¹¹⁹Rance resumed his seat, without however losing his mystified expression. ¹²⁰“I went back to the gate and sounded my whistle. ¹²¹That brought Murcher and two more to the spot.”

¹²²“Was the street empty then?”

¹²³“Well, it was, as far as anybody that could be of any good goes.”

¹²⁴“What do you mean?”

¹²⁵The constable's features broadened into a grin. ¹²⁶“I've seen many a drunk chap in my time,” he said, “but never anyone so cryin' drunk as that cove. ¹²⁷He was at the gate when I came out, a-leanin' up ag'in the railings, and a-singin' at the pitch o' his lungs about Columbine's New-fangled Banner, or some such stuff. ¹²⁸He couldn't stand, far less help.”

¹²⁹“What sort of a man was he?” asked Sherlock Holmes.

¹³⁰John Rance appeared to be somewhat irritated at this digression. ¹³¹“He was an uncommon drunk sort o' man,” he said. ¹³²“He'd ha' found hisself in the station if we hadn't been so took up.”

¹³³“His face—his dress—didn't you notice them?” Holmes broke in impatiently.

¹³⁴“I should think I did notice them, seeing that I had to prop him up—me and Murcher between us.

¹³⁵He was a long chap, with a red face, the lower part muffled round—”

¹³⁶“That will do,” cried Holmes. ¹³⁷“What became of him?”

¹³⁸“We'd enough to do without lookin' after him,” the policeman said, in an aggrieved voice. ¹³⁹“I'll wager he found his way home all right.”

¹⁴⁰“How was he dressed?”

¹⁴¹“A brown overcoat.”

¹⁴²“Had he a whip in his hand?”

¹⁴³“A whip—no.”

¹⁴⁴“He must have left it behind,” muttered my companion. ¹⁴⁵“You didn't happen to see or hear a cab after that?”

¹⁴⁶“No.”

¹⁴⁷“There's a half-sovereign for you,” my companion said, standing up and taking his hat. ¹⁴⁸“I am afraid, Rance, that you will never rise in the force. ¹⁴⁹That head of yours should be for use as well as ornament. ¹⁵⁰You might have gained your sergeant's stripes last night. ¹⁵¹The man whom you held in your hands is the man who holds the clue of this mystery, and whom we are seeking. ¹⁵²There is no use of arguing about it now; I tell you that it is so. ¹⁵³Come along, Doctor.”

¹⁵⁴We started off for the cab together, leaving our informant incredulous, but obviously uncomfortable.

¹⁵⁵“The blundering fool,” Holmes said, bitterly, as we drove back to our lodgings. ¹⁵⁶“Just to think of his having such an incomparable bit of good luck, and not taking advantage of it.”

¹⁵⁷“I am rather in the dark still. ¹⁵⁸It is true that the description of this man tallies with your idea of the second party in this mystery. ¹⁵⁹But why should he come back to the house after leaving it? ¹⁶⁰That is not the way of criminals.”

¹⁶¹“The ring, man, the ring: that was what he came back for. ¹⁶²If we have no other way of catching him, we can always bait our line with the ring. ¹⁶³I shall have him, Doctor—I'll lay you two to one that I have him. ¹⁶⁴I must thank you for it all. ¹⁶⁵I might not have gone but for you, and so have missed the finest study I ever came across: a study in scarlet, eh? ¹⁶⁶Why shouldn't we use a little art jargon. ¹⁶⁷There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it. ¹⁶⁸And now for lunch, and then for Norman Neruda. ¹⁶⁹Her attack and her bowing are splendid. ¹⁷⁰What's that little thing of Chopin's she plays so magnificently: Tra-la-la-lira-lira-lay.”

¹⁷¹Leaning back in the cab, this amateur bloodhound carolled away like a lark while I meditated upon the many-sidedness of the human mind.

Chapter V.

Our Advertisement Brings A Visitor

¹Our morning's exertions had been too much for my weak health, and I was tired out in the afternoon. ²After Holmes' departure for the concert, I lay down upon the sofa and endeavoured to get a couple of hours' sleep. ³It was a useless attempt. ⁴My mind had been too much excited by all that had occurred, and the strangest fancies and surmises crowded into it. ⁵Every time that I closed my eyes I saw before me the distorted baboon-like countenance of the murdered man. ⁶So sinister was the impression which that face had produced upon me that I found it difficult to feel anything but gratitude for him who had removed its owner from the world. ⁷If ever human features bespoke vice of the most malignant type, they were certainly those of Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland. ⁸Still I recognized that justice must be done, and that the depravity of the victim was no condonement in the eyes of the law.

⁹The more I thought of it the more extraordinary did my companion's hypothesis, that the man had been poisoned, appear. ¹⁰I remembered how he had sniffed his lips, and had no doubt that he had detected something which had given rise to the idea. ¹¹Then, again, if not poison, what had caused the man's death, since there was neither wound nor marks of strangulation? ¹²But, on the other hand, whose blood was that which lay so thickly upon the floor? ¹³There were no signs of a struggle, nor had the victim any weapon with which he might have wounded an antagonist. ¹⁴As long as all these questions were unsolved, I felt that sleep would be no easy matter, either for Holmes or myself. ¹⁵His quiet self-confident manner convinced me that he had already formed a theory which explained all the facts, though what it was I could not for an instant conjecture.

¹⁶He was very late in returning—so late, that I knew that the concert could not have detained him all the time. ¹⁷Dinner was on the table before he appeared.

¹⁸"It was magnificent," he said, as he took his seat. ¹⁹"Do you remember what Darwin says about music? ²⁰He claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. ²¹Perhaps that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. ²²There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in its childhood."

²³"That's rather a broad idea," I remarked.

²⁴"One's ideas must be as broad as Nature if they are to interpret Nature," he answered. ²⁵"What's the matter? ²⁶You're not looking quite yourself. ²⁷This Brixton Road affair has upset you."

²⁸"To tell the truth, it has," I said. ²⁹"I ought to be more case-hardened after my Afghan experiences. ³⁰I saw my own comrades hacked to pieces at Maiwand without losing my nerve."

³¹"I can understand. ³²There is a mystery about this which stimulates the imagination; where there is no imagination there is no horror. ³³Have you seen the evening paper?"

³⁴"No."

³⁵"It gives a fairly good account of the affair. ³⁶It does not mention the fact that when the man was raised up, a woman's wedding ring fell upon the floor. ³⁷It is just as well it does not."

³⁸"Why?"

³⁹"Look at this advertisement," he answered. ⁴⁰"I had one sent to every paper this morning immediately after the affair."

⁴¹He threw the paper across to me and I glanced at the place indicated. ⁴²It was the first announcement in the "Found" column. ⁴³"In Brixton Road, this morning," it ran, "a plain gold wedding ring, found in the roadway between the 'White Hart' Tavern and Holland Grove. ⁴⁴Apply Dr. Watson, 221b, Baker Street, between eight and nine this evening."

⁴⁵"Excuse my using your name," he said. ⁴⁶"If I used my own some of these dunderheads would recognize it, and want to meddle in the affair."

⁴⁷"That is all right," I answered. ⁴⁸"But supposing anyone applies, I have no ring."

⁴⁹"Oh yes, you have," said he, handing me one. ⁵⁰"This will do very well. ⁵¹It is almost a facsimile."

⁵²"And who do you expect will answer this advertisement?"

⁵³"Why, the man in the brown coat—our florid friend with the square toes. ⁵⁴If he does not come himself he will send an accomplice."

⁵⁵"Would he not consider it as too dangerous?"

⁵⁶"Not at all. If my view of the case is correct, and I have every reason to believe that it is, this man would rather risk anything than lose the ring. ⁵⁷According to my notion he dropped it while stooping over Drebbler's body, and did not miss it at the time. ⁵⁸After leaving the house he discovered his loss and hurried back, but found the police already in possession, owing to his own folly in leaving the candle burning. ⁵⁹He had to pretend to be drunk in order to allay the suspicions which might have been aroused by his appearance at the gate. ⁶⁰Now put yourself in that man's place. ⁶¹On thinking the matter over, it must have occurred to him that it was possible that he had lost the ring in the road after leaving the house. ⁶²What would he do, then? ⁶³He would eagerly look out for the evening papers in the hope of seeing it among the articles found. ⁶⁴His eye, of course, would light upon this. ⁶⁵He would be overjoyed. ⁶⁶Why should he fear a trap? ⁶⁷There would be no reason in his eyes why the finding of the ring should be connected with the murder. ⁶⁸He would come. ⁶⁹He will come. ⁷⁰You shall see him within an hour."

⁷¹"And then?" I asked.

⁷²"Oh, you can leave me to deal with him then. ⁷³Have you any arms?"

⁷⁴"I have my old service revolver and a few cartridges."

⁷⁵"You had better clean it and load it. ⁷⁶He will be a desperate man, and though I shall take him unawares, it is as well to be ready for anything."

⁷⁷I went to my bedroom and followed his advice. ⁷⁸When I returned with the pistol the table had been cleared, and Holmes was engaged in his favourite occupation of scraping upon his violin.

⁷⁹"The plot thickens," he said, as I entered; "I have just had an answer to my American telegram. ⁸⁰My view of the case is the correct one."

⁸¹"And that is?" I asked eagerly.

⁸²"My fiddle would be the better for new strings," he remarked. ⁸³"Put your pistol in your pocket. ⁸⁴When the fellow comes speak to him in an ordinary way. ⁸⁵Leave the rest to me. ⁸⁶Don't frighten him by looking at him too hard."

⁸⁷"It is eight o'clock now," I said, glancing at my watch.

⁸⁸"Yes. ⁸⁹He will probably be here in a few minutes. ⁹⁰Open the door slightly. ⁹¹That will do. ⁹²Now put the key on the inside. ⁹³Thank you! ⁹⁴This is a queer old book I picked up at a stall yesterday—De Jure

inter Gentes—published in Latin at Liege in the Lowlands, in 1642. ⁹⁵Charles' head was still firm on his shoulders when this little brown-backed volume was struck off.”

⁹⁶“Who is the printer?”

⁹⁷“Philippe de Croy, whoever he may have been. ⁹⁸On the fly-leaf, in very faded ink, is written ‘Ex libris Guliolmi Whyte.’ ⁹⁹I wonder who William Whyte was. ¹⁰⁰Some pragmatistical seventeenth century lawyer, I suppose. ¹⁰¹His writing has a legal twist about it. ¹⁰²Here comes our man, I think.”

¹⁰³As he spoke there was a sharp ring at the bell. ¹⁰⁴Sherlock Holmes rose softly and moved his chair in the direction of the door. ¹⁰⁵We heard the servant pass along the hall, and the sharp click of the latch as she opened it.

¹⁰⁶“Does Dr. Watson live here?” asked a clear but rather harsh voice. ¹⁰⁷We could not hear the servant's reply, but the door closed, and some one began to ascend the stairs. ¹⁰⁸The footfall was an uncertain and shuffling one. ¹⁰⁹A look of surprise passed over the face of my companion as he listened to it. ¹¹⁰It came slowly along the passage, and there was a feeble tap at the door.

¹¹¹“Come in,” I cried.

¹¹²At my summons, instead of the man of violence whom we expected, a very old and wrinkled woman hobbled into the apartment. ¹¹³She appeared to be dazzled by the sudden blaze of light, and after dropping a curtsy, she stood blinking at us with her bleared eyes and fumbling in her pocket with nervous, shaky fingers. ¹¹⁴I glanced at my companion, and his face had assumed such a disconsolate expression that it was all I could do to keep my countenance.

¹¹⁵The old crone drew out an evening paper, and pointed at our advertisement. ¹¹⁶“It's this as has brought me, good gentlemen,” she said, dropping another curtsy; “a gold wedding ring in the Brixton Road. ¹¹⁷It belongs to my girl Sally, as was married only this time twelvemonth, which her husband is steward aboard a Union boat, and what he'd say if he comes 'ome and found her without her ring is more than I can think, he being short enough at the best o' times, but more especially when he has the drink. ¹¹⁸If it please you, she went to the circus last night along with—”

¹¹⁹“Is that her ring?” I asked.

¹²⁰“The Lord be thanked!” cried the old woman; “Sally will be a glad woman this night. ¹²¹That's the ring.”

¹²²“And what may your address be?” I inquired, taking up a pencil.

¹²³“13, Duncan Street, Houndsditch. ¹²⁴A weary way from here.”

¹²⁵“The Brixton Road does not lie between any circus and Houndsditch,” said Sherlock Holmes sharply.

¹²⁶The old woman faced round and looked keenly at him from her little red-rimmed eyes. ¹²⁷“The gentleman asked me for my address,” she said. ¹²⁸“Sally lives in lodgings at 3, Mayfield Place, Peckham.”

¹²⁹“And your name is—?”

¹³⁰“My name is Sawyer—her's is Dennis, which Tom Dennis married her—and a smart, clean lad, too, as long as he's at sea, and no steward in the company more thought of; but when on shore, what with the women and what with liquor shops—”

¹³¹“Here is your ring, Mrs. Sawyer,” I interrupted, in obedience to a sign from my companion; “it clearly belongs to your daughter, and I am glad to be able to restore it to the rightful owner.”

¹³²With many mumbled blessings and protestations of gratitude the old crone packed it away in her pocket, and shuffled off down the stairs. ¹³³Sherlock Holmes sprang to his feet the moment that she was gone and rushed into his room. ¹³⁴He returned in a few seconds enveloped in an ulster and a cravat. ¹³⁵"I'll follow her," he said, hurriedly; "she must be an accomplice, and will lead me to him. ¹³⁶Wait up for me." ¹³⁷The hall door had hardly slammed behind our visitor before Holmes had descended the stair. ¹³⁸Looking through the window I could see her walking feebly along the other side, while her pursuer dogged her some little distance behind. ¹³⁹"Either his whole theory is incorrect," I thought to myself, "or else he will be led now to the heart of the mystery." ¹⁴⁰There was no need for him to ask me to wait up for him, for I felt that sleep was impossible until I heard the result of his adventure.

¹⁴¹It was close upon nine when he set out. ¹⁴²I had no idea how long he might be, but I sat stolidly puffing at my pipe and skipping over the pages of Henri Murger's *Vie de Bohème*. ¹⁴³Ten o'clock passed, and I heard the footsteps of the maid as they pattered off to bed. ¹⁴⁴Eleven, and the more stately tread of the landlady passed my door, bound for the same destination. ¹⁴⁵It was close upon twelve before I heard the sharp sound of his latch-key. ¹⁴⁶The instant he entered I saw by his face that he had not been successful. ¹⁴⁷Amusement and chagrin seemed to be struggling for the mastery, until the former suddenly carried the day, and he burst into a hearty laugh.

¹⁴⁸"I wouldn't have the Scotland Yarders know it for the world," he cried, dropping into his chair; "I have chaffed them so much that they would never have let me hear the end of it. ¹⁴⁹I can afford to laugh, because I know that I will be even with them in the long run."

¹⁵⁰"What is it then?" I asked.

¹⁵¹"Oh, I don't mind telling a story against myself. ¹⁵²That creature had gone a little way when she began to limp and show every sign of being foot-sore. ¹⁵³Presently she came to a halt, and hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. ¹⁵⁴I managed to be close to her so as to hear the address, but I need not have been so anxious, for she sang it out loud enough to be heard at the other side of the street, 'Drive to 13, Duncan Street, Houndsditch,' she cried. ¹⁵⁵This begins to look genuine, I thought, and having seen her safely inside, I perched myself behind. ¹⁵⁶That's an art which every detective should be an expert at. ¹⁵⁷Well, away we rattled, and never drew rein until we reached the street in question. ¹⁵⁸I hopped off before we came to the door, and strolled down the street in an easy, lounging way. ¹⁵⁹I saw the cab pull up. ¹⁶⁰The driver jumped down, and I saw him open the door and stand expectantly. ¹⁶¹Nothing came out though. ¹⁶²When I reached him he was groping about frantically in the empty cab, and giving vent to the finest assorted collection of oaths that ever I listened to. ¹⁶³There was no sign or trace of his passenger, and I fear it will be some time before he gets his fare. ¹⁶⁴On inquiring at Number 13 we found that the house belonged to a respectable paperhanger, named Keswick, and that no one of the name either of Sawyer or Dennis had ever been heard of there."

¹⁶⁵"You don't mean to say," I cried, in amazement, "that that tottering, feeble old woman was able to get out of the cab while it was in motion, without either you or the driver seeing her?"

¹⁶⁶"Old woman be damned!" said Sherlock Holmes, sharply. ¹⁶⁷"We were the old women to be so taken in. ¹⁶⁸It must have been a young man, and an active one, too, besides being an incomparable actor. ¹⁶⁹The get-up was inimitable. ¹⁷⁰He saw that he was followed, no doubt, and used this means of giving me the slip. ¹⁷¹It shows that the man we are after is not as lonely as I imagined he was, but has friends who are ready to risk something for him. ¹⁷²Now, Doctor, you are looking done-up. ¹⁷³Take my advice and turn in."

¹⁷⁴I was certainly feeling very weary, so I obeyed his injunction. ¹⁷⁵I left Holmes seated in front of the smouldering fire, and long into the watches of the night I heard the low, melancholy wailings of his violin, and knew that he was still pondering over the strange problem which he had set himself to unravel.

Chapter VI.

Tobias Gregson Shows What He Can Do

¹The papers next day were full of the “Brixton Mystery,” as they termed it. ²Each had a long account of the affair, and some had leaders upon it in addition. ³There was some information in them which was new to me. ⁴I still retain in my scrap-book numerous clippings and extracts bearing upon the case. ⁵Here is a condensation of a few of them:—

⁶The Daily Telegraph remarked that in the history of crime there had seldom been a tragedy which presented stranger features. ⁷The German name of the victim, the absence of all other motive, and the sinister inscription on the wall, all pointed to its perpetration by political refugees and revolutionists. ⁸The Socialists had many branches in America, and the deceased had, no doubt, infringed their unwritten laws, and been tracked down by them. ⁹After alluding airily to the Vehmgericht, aqua tofana, Carbonari, the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, the Darwinian theory, the principles of Malthus, and the Ratcliff Highway murders, the article concluded by admonishing the Government and advocating a closer watch over foreigners in England.

¹⁰The Standard commented upon the fact that lawless outrages of the sort usually occurred under a Liberal Administration. ¹¹They arose from the unsettling of the minds of the masses, and the consequent weakening of all authority. ¹²The deceased was an American gentleman who had been residing for some weeks in the Metropolis. ¹³He had stayed at the boarding-house of Madame Charpentier, in Torquay Terrace, Camberwell. ¹⁴He was accompanied in his travels by his private secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson. ¹⁵The two bade adieu to their landlady upon Tuesday, the 4th inst., and departed to Euston Station with the avowed intention of catching the Liverpool express. ¹⁶They were afterwards seen together upon the platform. ¹⁷Nothing more is known of them until Mr. Drebber's body was, as recorded, discovered in an empty house in the Brixton Road, many miles from Euston. ¹⁸How he came there, or how he met his fate, are questions which are still involved in mystery. ¹⁹Nothing is known of the whereabouts of Stangerson. ²⁰We are glad to learn that Mr. Lestrade and Mr. Gregson, of Scotland Yard, are both engaged upon the case, and it is confidently anticipated that these well-known officers will speedily throw light upon the matter.

²¹The Daily News observed that there was no doubt as to the crime being a political one. ²²The despotism and hatred of Liberalism which animated the Continental Governments had had the effect of driving to our shores a number of men who might have made excellent citizens were they not soured by the recollection of all that they had undergone. ²³Among these men there was a stringent code of honour, any infringement of which was punished by death. ²⁴Every effort should be made to find the secretary, Stangerson, and to ascertain some particulars of the habits of the deceased. ²⁵A great step had been gained by the discovery of the address of the house at which he had boarded—a result which was entirely due to the acuteness and energy of Mr. Gregson of Scotland Yard.

²⁶Sherlock Holmes and I read these notices over together at breakfast, and they appeared to afford him considerable amusement.

²⁷“I told you that, whatever happened, Lestrade and Gregson would be sure to score.”

²⁸“That depends on how it turns out.”

²⁹“Oh, bless you, it doesn't matter in the least. ³⁰If the man is caught, it will be on account of their exertions; if he escapes, it will be in spite of their exertions. ³¹It's heads I win and tails you lose.

³²Whatever they do, they will have followers. ³³“Un sot trouve toujours un plus sot qui l'admire.””

³⁴“What on earth is this?” I cried, for at this moment there came the pattering of many steps in the hall and on the stairs, accompanied by audible expressions of disgust upon the part of our landlady.

³⁵“It's the Baker Street division of the detective police force,” said my companion, gravely; and as he spoke there rushed into the room half a dozen of the dirtiest and most ragged street Arabs that ever I clapped eyes on.

³⁶“Tention!” cried Holmes, in a sharp tone, and the six dirty little scoundrels stood in a line like so many disreputable statuettes. ³⁷“In future you shall send up Wiggins alone to report, and the rest of you must wait in the street. ³⁸Have you found it, Wiggins?”

³⁹“No, sir, we hain't,” said one of the youths.

⁴⁰“I hardly expected you would. ⁴¹You must keep on until you do. ⁴²Here are your wages.” ⁴³He handed each of them a shilling. ⁴⁴“Now, off you go, and come back with a better report next time.”

⁴⁵He waved his hand, and they scampered away downstairs like so many rats, and we heard their shrill voices next moment in the street.

⁴⁶“There's more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force,” Holmes remarked. ⁴⁷“The mere sight of an official-looking person seals men's lips. ⁴⁸These youngsters, however, go everywhere and hear everything. ⁴⁹They are as sharp as needles, too; all they want is organisation.”

⁵⁰“Is it on this Brixton case that you are employing them?” I asked.

⁵¹“Yes; there is a point which I wish to ascertain. ⁵²It is merely a matter of time. ⁵³Hullo! we are going to hear some news now with a vengeance! ⁵⁴Here is Gregson coming down the road with beatitude written upon every feature of his face. ⁵⁵Bound for us, I know. ⁵⁶Yes, he is stopping. ⁵⁷There he is!”

⁵⁸There was a violent peal at the bell, and in a few seconds the fair-haired detective came up the stairs, three steps at a time, and burst into our sitting-room.

⁵⁹“My dear fellow,” he cried, wringing Holmes' unresponsive hand, “congratulate me! ⁶⁰I have made the whole thing as clear as day.”

⁶¹A shade of anxiety seemed to me to cross my companion's expressive face.

⁶²“Do you mean that you are on the right track?” he asked.

⁶³“The right track! ⁶⁴Why, sir, we have the man under lock and key.”

⁶⁵“And his name is?”

⁶⁶“Arthur Charpentier, sub-lieutenant in Her Majesty's navy,” cried Gregson, pompously, rubbing his fat hands and inflating his chest.

⁶⁷Sherlock Holmes gave a sigh of relief, and relaxed into a smile.

⁶⁸“Take a seat, and try one of these cigars,” he said. ⁶⁹“We are anxious to know how you managed it. ⁷⁰Will you have some whiskey and water?”

⁷¹“I don't mind if I do,” the detective answered. ⁷²“The tremendous exertions which I have gone through during the last day or two have worn me out. ⁷³Not so much bodily exertion, you understand, as the strain upon the mind. ⁷⁴You will appreciate that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, for we are both brain-workers.”

⁷⁵“You do me too much honour,” said Holmes, gravely. ⁷⁶“Let us hear how you arrived at this most gratifying result.”

⁷⁷The detective seated himself in the arm-chair, and puffed complacently at his cigar. ⁷⁸Then suddenly he slapped his thigh in a paroxysm of amusement.

⁷⁹“The fun of it is,” he cried, “that that fool Lestrade, who thinks himself so smart, has gone off upon the wrong track altogether. ⁸⁰He is after the secretary Stangerson, who had no more to do with the crime than the babe unborn. ⁸¹I have no doubt that he has caught him by this time.”

⁸²The idea tickled Gregson so much that he laughed until he choked.

⁸³“And how did you get your clue?”

⁸⁴“Ah, I’ll tell you all about it. ⁸⁵Of course, Doctor Watson, this is strictly between ourselves. ⁸⁶The first difficulty which we had to contend with was the finding of this American’s antecedents. ⁸⁷Some people would have waited until their advertisements were answered, or until parties came forward and volunteered information. ⁸⁸That is not Tobias Gregson’s way of going to work. ⁸⁹You remember the hat beside the dead man?”

⁹⁰“Yes,” said Holmes; “by John Underwood and Sons, 129, Camberwell Road.”

⁹¹Gregson looked quite crest-fallen.

⁹²“I had no idea that you noticed that,” he said. ⁹³“Have you been there?”

⁹⁴“No.”

⁹⁵“Ha!” cried Gregson, in a relieved voice; “you should never neglect a chance, however small it may seem.”

⁹⁶“To a great mind, nothing is little,” remarked Holmes, sententiously.

⁹⁷“Well, I went to Underwood, and asked him if he had sold a hat of that size and description. ⁹⁸He looked over his books, and came on it at once. ⁹⁹He had sent the hat to a Mr. Drebbler, residing at Charpentier’s Boarding Establishment, Torquay Terrace. ¹⁰⁰Thus I got at his address.”

¹⁰¹“Smart—very smart!” murmured Sherlock Holmes.

¹⁰²“I next called upon Madame Charpentier,” continued the detective. ¹⁰³“I found her very pale and distressed. ¹⁰⁴Her daughter was in the room, too—an uncommonly fine girl she is, too; she was looking red about the eyes and her lips trembled as I spoke to her. ¹⁰⁵That didn’t escape my notice. ¹⁰⁶I began to smell a rat. ¹⁰⁷You know the feeling, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, when you come upon the right scent—a kind of thrill in your nerves. ¹⁰⁸‘Have you heard of the mysterious death of your late boarder Mr. Enoch J. Drebbler, of Cleveland?’ I asked.

¹⁰⁹“The mother nodded. ¹¹⁰She didn’t seem able to get out a word. ¹¹¹The daughter burst into tears. ¹¹²I felt more than ever that these people knew something of the matter.

¹¹³“‘At what o’clock did Mr. Drebbler leave your house for the train?’ I asked.

¹¹⁴“‘At eight o’clock,’ she said, gulping in her throat to keep down her agitation. ¹¹⁵‘His secretary, Mr. Stangerson, said that there were two trains—one at 9.15 and one at 11. ¹¹⁶He was to catch the first.’

¹¹⁷“‘And was that the last which you saw of him?’

¹¹⁸“A terrible change came over the woman’s face as I asked the question. ¹¹⁹Her features turned perfectly livid. ¹²⁰It was some seconds before she could get out the single word ‘Yes’—and when it did come it was in a husky unnatural tone.

¹²¹“There was silence for a moment, and then the daughter spoke in a calm clear voice.

¹²²“No good can ever come of falsehood, mother,” she said. ¹²³“Let us be frank with this gentleman. ¹²⁴We did see Mr. Drebber again.”

¹²⁵“God forgive you!” cried Madame Charpentier, throwing up her hands and sinking back in her chair. ¹²⁶“You have murdered your brother.”

¹²⁷“Arthur would rather that we spoke the truth,” the girl answered firmly.

¹²⁸“You had best tell me all about it now,” I said. ¹²⁹“Half-confidences are worse than none. ¹³⁰Besides, you do not know how much we know of it.”

¹³¹“On your head be it, Alice!” cried her mother; and then, turning to me, “I will tell you all, sir. ¹³²Do not imagine that my agitation on behalf of my son arises from any fear lest he should have had a hand in this terrible affair. ¹³³He is utterly innocent of it. ¹³⁴My dread is, however, that in your eyes and in the eyes of others he may appear to be compromised. ¹³⁵That however is surely impossible. ¹³⁶His high character, his profession, his antecedents would all forbid it.”

¹³⁷“Your best way is to make a clean breast of the facts,” I answered. ¹³⁸“Depend upon it, if your son is innocent he will be none the worse.”

¹³⁹“Perhaps, Alice, you had better leave us together,” she said, and her daughter withdrew. ¹⁴⁰“Now, sir,” she continued, “I had no intention of telling you all this, but since my poor daughter has disclosed it I have no alternative. ¹⁴¹Having once decided to speak, I will tell you all without omitting any particular.”

¹⁴²“It is your wisest course,” said I.

¹⁴³“Mr. Drebber has been with us nearly three weeks. ¹⁴⁴He and his secretary, Mr. Stangerson, had been travelling on the Continent. ¹⁴⁵I noticed a “Copenhagen” label upon each of their trunks, showing that that had been their last stopping place. ¹⁴⁶Stangerson was a quiet reserved man, but his employer, I am sorry to say, was far otherwise. ¹⁴⁷He was coarse in his habits and brutish in his ways. ¹⁴⁸The very night of his arrival he became very much the worse for drink, and, indeed, after twelve o'clock in the day he could hardly ever be said to be sober. ¹⁴⁹His manners towards the maid-servants were disgustingly free and familiar. ¹⁵⁰Worst of all, he speedily assumed the same attitude towards my daughter, Alice, and spoke to her more than once in a way which, fortunately, she is too innocent to understand. ¹⁵¹On one occasion he actually seized her in his arms and embraced her—an outrage which caused his own secretary to reproach him for his unmanly conduct.”

¹⁵²“But why did you stand all this,” I asked. ¹⁵³“I suppose that you can get rid of your boarders when you wish.”

¹⁵⁴“Mrs. Charpentier blushed at my pertinent question. ¹⁵⁵“Would to God that I had given him notice on the very day that he came,” she said. ¹⁵⁶“But it was a sore temptation. ¹⁵⁷They were paying a pound a day each—fourteen pounds a week, and this is the slack season. ¹⁵⁸I am a widow, and my boy in the Navy has cost me much. ¹⁵⁹I grudged to lose the money. ¹⁶⁰I acted for the best. ¹⁶¹This last was too much, however, and I gave him notice to leave on account of it. ¹⁶²That was the reason of his going.”

¹⁶³“Well?”

¹⁶⁴“My heart grew light when I saw him drive away. ¹⁶⁵My son is on leave just now, but I did not tell him anything of all this, for his temper is violent, and he is passionately fond of his sister. ¹⁶⁶When I closed the door behind them a load seemed to be lifted from my mind. ¹⁶⁷Alas, in less than an hour there was a ring at the bell, and I learned that Mr. Drebber had returned. ¹⁶⁸He was much excited, and evidently the worse for drink. ¹⁶⁹He forced his way into the room, where I was sitting with my daughter, and made some incoherent remark about having missed his train. ¹⁷⁰He then turned to Alice, and before my very face, proposed to her that she should fly with him. ¹⁷¹“You are of age,” he said, “and there is

no law to stop you. ¹⁷²I have money enough and to spare. ¹⁷³Never mind the old girl here, but come along with me now straight away. ¹⁷⁴You shall live like a princess.” ¹⁷⁵Poor Alice was so frightened that she shrunk away from him, but he caught her by the wrist and endeavoured to draw her towards the door. ¹⁷⁶I screamed, and at that moment my son Arthur came into the room. ¹⁷⁷What happened then I do not know. ¹⁷⁸I heard oaths and the confused sounds of a scuffle. ¹⁷⁹I was too terrified to raise my head. ¹⁸⁰When I did look up I saw Arthur standing in the doorway laughing, with a stick in his hand. ¹⁸¹“I don't think that fine fellow will trouble us again,” he said. ¹⁸²“I will just go after him and see what he does with himself.” ¹⁸³With those words he took his hat and started off down the street. ¹⁸⁴The next morning we heard of Mr. Drebbler's mysterious death.’

¹⁸⁵“This statement came from Mrs. Charpentier's lips with many gasps and pauses. ¹⁸⁶At times she spoke so low that I could hardly catch the words. ¹⁸⁷I made shorthand notes of all that she said, however, so that there should be no possibility of a mistake.”

¹⁸⁸“It's quite exciting,” said Sherlock Holmes, with a yawn. ¹⁸⁹“What happened next?”

¹⁹⁰“When Mrs. Charpentier paused,” the detective continued, “I saw that the whole case hung upon one point. ¹⁹¹Fixing her with my eye in a way which I always found effective with women, I asked her at what hour her son returned.

¹⁹²“‘I do not know,’ she answered.

¹⁹³“‘Not know?’

¹⁹⁴“‘No; he has a latch-key, and he let himself in.’

¹⁹⁵“‘After you went to bed?’

¹⁹⁶“‘Yes.’

¹⁹⁷“‘When did you go to bed?’

¹⁹⁸“‘About eleven.’

¹⁹⁹“‘So your son was gone at least two hours?’

²⁰⁰“‘Yes.’

²⁰¹“‘Possibly four or five?’

²⁰²“‘Yes.’

²⁰³“‘What was he doing during that time?’

²⁰⁴“‘I do not know,’ she answered, turning white to her very lips.

²⁰⁵“Of course after that there was nothing more to be done. ²⁰⁶I found out where Lieutenant Charpentier was, took two officers with me, and arrested him. ²⁰⁷When I touched him on the shoulder and warned him to come quietly with us, he answered us as bold as brass, ‘I suppose you are arresting me for being concerned in the death of that scoundrel Drebbler,’ he said. ²⁰⁸We had said nothing to him about it, so that his alluding to it had a most suspicious aspect.”

²⁰⁹“Very,” said Holmes.

²¹⁰“He still carried the heavy stick which the mother described him as having with him when he followed Drebbler. ²¹¹It was a stout oak cudgel.”

²¹²“What is your theory, then?”

²¹³“Well, my theory is that he followed Drebbler as far as the Brixton Road. ²¹⁴When there, a fresh altercation arose between them, in the course of which Drebbler received a blow from the stick, in the pit of the stomach, perhaps, which killed him without leaving any mark. ²¹⁵The night was so wet that no one was about, so Charpentier dragged the body of his victim into the empty house. ²¹⁶As to the candle, and the blood, and the writing on the wall, and the ring, they may all be so many tricks to throw the police on to the wrong scent.”

²¹⁷“Well done!” said Holmes in an encouraging voice. ²¹⁸“Really, Gregson, you are getting along. ²¹⁹We shall make something of you yet.”

²²⁰“I flatter myself that I have managed it rather neatly,” the detective answered proudly. ²²¹“The young man volunteered a statement, in which he said that after following Drebbler some time, the latter perceived him, and took a cab in order to get away from him. ²²²On his way home he met an old shipmate, and took a long walk with him. ²²³On being asked where this old shipmate lived, he was unable to give any satisfactory reply. I think the whole case fits together uncommonly well. ²²⁴What amuses me is to think of Lestrade, who had started off upon the wrong scent. ²²⁵I am afraid he won't make much of—²²⁶Why, by Jove, here's the very man himself!”

²²⁷It was indeed Lestrade, who had ascended the stairs while we were talking, and who now entered the room. ²²⁸The assurance and jauntiness which generally marked his demeanour and dress were, however, wanting. ²²⁹His face was disturbed and troubled, while his clothes were disarranged and untidy. ²³⁰He had evidently come with the intention of consulting with Sherlock Holmes, for on perceiving his colleague he appeared to be embarrassed and put out. ²³¹He stood in the centre of the room, fumbling nervously with his hat and uncertain what to do. ²³²“This is a most extraordinary case,” he said at last—“a most incomprehensible affair.”

²³³“Ah, you find it so, Mr. Lestrade!” cried Gregson, triumphantly. ²³⁴“I thought you would come to that conclusion. ²³⁵Have you managed to find the Secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson?”

²³⁶“The Secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson,” said Lestrade gravely, “was murdered at Halliday's Private Hotel about six o'clock this morning.”

Chapter VII.

Light In The Darkness

¹The intelligence with which Lestrade greeted us was so momentous and so unexpected, that we were all three fairly dumbfounded. ²Gregson sprang out of his chair and upset the remainder of his whiskey and water. ³I stared in silence at Sherlock Holmes, whose lips were compressed and his brows drawn down over his eyes.

⁴“Stangerson too!” he muttered. ⁵“The plot thickens.”

⁶“It was quite thick enough before,” grumbled Lestrade, taking a chair. ⁷“I seem to have dropped into a sort of council of war.”

⁸“Are you—are you sure of this piece of intelligence?” stammered Gregson.

⁹“I have just come from his room,” said Lestrade. ¹⁰“I was the first to discover what had occurred.”

¹¹“We have been hearing Gregson's view of the matter,” Holmes observed. ¹²“Would you mind letting us know what you have seen and done?”

¹³“I have no objection,” Lestrade answered, seating himself. ¹⁴“I freely confess that I was of the opinion that Stangerson was concerned in the death of Drebbler. ¹⁵This fresh development has shown me that I was completely mistaken. ¹⁶Full of the one idea, I set myself to find out what had become of the Secretary. ¹⁷They had been seen together at Euston Station about half-past eight on the evening of the third. ¹⁸At two in the morning Drebbler had been found in the Brixton Road. ¹⁹The question which confronted me was to find out how Stangerson had been employed between 8.30 and the time of the crime, and what had become of him afterwards. ²⁰I telegraphed to Liverpool, giving a description of the man, and warning them to keep a watch upon the American boats. ²¹I then set to work calling upon all the hotels and lodging-houses in the vicinity of Euston. ²²You see, I argued that if Drebbler and his companion had become separated, the natural course for the latter would be to put up somewhere in the vicinity for the night, and then to hang about the station again next morning.”

²³“They would be likely to agree on some meeting-place beforehand,” remarked Holmes.

²⁴“So it proved. I spent the whole of yesterday evening in making enquiries entirely without avail. ²⁵This morning I began very early, and at eight o'clock I reached Halliday's Private Hotel, in Little George Street. ²⁶On my enquiry as to whether a Mr. Stangerson was living there, they at once answered me in the affirmative.

²⁷“‘No doubt you are the gentleman whom he was expecting,’ they said. ²⁸‘He has been waiting for a gentleman for two days.’

²⁹“‘Where is he now?’ I asked.

³⁰“‘He is upstairs in bed. ³¹He wished to be called at nine.’

³²“‘I will go up and see him at once,’ I said.

³³“It seemed to me that my sudden appearance might shake his nerves and lead him to say something unguarded. ³⁴The Boots volunteered to show me the room: it was on the second floor, and there was a small corridor leading up to it. ³⁵The Boots pointed out the door to me, and was about to go downstairs again when I saw something that made me feel sickish, in spite of my twenty years' experience. ³⁶From under the door there curled a little red ribbon of blood, which had meandered across the passage and formed a little pool along the skirting at the other side. ³⁷I gave a cry, which brought the Boots back.

³⁸He nearly fainted when he saw it. ³⁹The door was locked on the inside, but we put our shoulders to it, and knocked it in. ⁴⁰The window of the room was open, and beside the window, all huddled up, lay the body of a man in his nightdress. ⁴¹He was quite dead, and had been for some time, for his limbs were rigid and cold. ⁴²When we turned him over, the Boots recognized him at once as being the same gentleman who had engaged the room under the name of Joseph Stangerson. ⁴³The cause of death was a deep stab in the left side, which must have penetrated the heart. ⁴⁴And now comes the strangest part of the affair. ⁴⁵What do you suppose was above the murdered man?"

⁴⁶I felt a creeping of the flesh, and a presentiment of coming horror, even before Sherlock Holmes answered.

⁴⁷"The word RACHE, written in letters of blood," he said.

⁴⁸"That was it," said Lestrade, in an awe-struck voice; and we were all silent for a while.

⁴⁹There was something so methodical and so incomprehensible about the deeds of this unknown assassin, that it imparted a fresh ghastliness to his crimes. ⁵⁰My nerves, which were steady enough on the field of battle tingled as I thought of it.

⁵¹"The man was seen," continued Lestrade. ⁵²"A milk boy, passing on his way to the dairy, happened to walk down the lane which leads from the mews at the back of the hotel. ⁵³He noticed that a ladder, which usually lay there, was raised against one of the windows of the second floor, which was wide open. ⁵⁴After passing, he looked back and saw a man descend the ladder. ⁵⁵He came down so quietly and openly that the boy imagined him to be some carpenter or joiner at work in the hotel. ⁵⁶He took no particular notice of him, beyond thinking in his own mind that it was early for him to be at work. ⁵⁷He has an impression that the man was tall, had a reddish face, and was dressed in a long, brownish coat. ⁵⁸He must have stayed in the room some little time after the murder, for we found blood-stained water in the basin, where he had washed his hands, and marks on the sheets where he had deliberately wiped his knife."

⁵⁹I glanced at Holmes on hearing the description of the murderer, which tallied so exactly with his own.

⁶⁰There was, however, no trace of exultation or satisfaction upon his face.

⁶¹"Did you find nothing in the room which could furnish a clue to the murderer?" he asked.

⁶²"Nothing. ⁶³Stangerson had Drebbler's purse in his pocket, but it seems that this was usual, as he did all the paying. ⁶⁴There was eighty odd pounds in it, but nothing had been taken. ⁶⁵Whatever the motives of these extraordinary crimes, robbery is certainly not one of them. ⁶⁶There were no papers or memoranda in the murdered man's pocket, except a single telegram, dated from Cleveland about a month ago, and containing the words, 'J. H. is in Europe.' ⁶⁷There was no name appended to this message."

⁶⁸"And there was nothing else?" Holmes asked.

⁶⁹"Nothing of any importance. ⁷⁰The man's novel, with which he had read himself to sleep was lying upon the bed, and his pipe was on a chair beside him. ⁷¹There was a glass of water on the table, and on the window-sill a small chip ointment box containing a couple of pills."

⁷²Sherlock Holmes sprang from his chair with an exclamation of delight.

⁷³"The last link," he cried, exultantly. ⁷⁴"My case is complete."

⁷⁵The two detectives stared at him in amazement.

⁷⁶"I have now in my hands," my companion said, confidently, "all the threads which have formed such a tangle. ⁷⁷There are, of course, details to be filled in, but I am as certain of all the main facts, from the

time that Drebber parted from Stangerson at the station, up to the discovery of the body of the latter, as if I had seen them with my own eyes. ⁷⁸I will give you a proof of my knowledge. ⁷⁹Could you lay your hand upon those pills?"

⁸⁰"I have them," said Lestrade, producing a small white box; "I took them and the purse and the telegram, intending to have them put in a place of safety at the Police Station. ⁸¹It was the merest chance my taking these pills, for I am bound to say that I do not attach any importance to them."

⁸²"Give them here," said Holmes. ⁸³"Now, Doctor," turning to me, "are those ordinary pills?"

⁸⁴"They certainly were not. ⁸⁵They were of a pearly grey colour, small, round, and almost transparent against the light. ⁸⁶"From their lightness and transparency, I should imagine that they are soluble in water," I remarked.

⁸⁷"Precisely so," answered Holmes. ⁸⁸"Now would you mind going down and fetching that poor little devil of a terrier which has been bad so long, and which the landlady wanted you to put out of its pain yesterday."

⁸⁹I went downstairs and carried the dog upstairs in my arms. ⁹⁰It's laboured breathing and glazing eye showed that it was not far from its end. ⁹¹Indeed, its snow-white muzzle proclaimed that it had already exceeded the usual term of canine existence. ⁹²I placed it upon a cushion on the rug.

⁹³"I will now cut one of these pills in two," said Holmes, and drawing his penknife he suited the action to the word. ⁹⁴"One half we return into the box for future purposes. ⁹⁵The other half I will place in this wine glass, in which is a teaspoonful of water. ⁹⁶You perceive that our friend, the Doctor, is right, and that it readily dissolves."

⁹⁷"This may be very interesting," said Lestrade, in the injured tone of one who suspects that he is being laughed at, "I cannot see, however, what it has to do with the death of Mr. Joseph Stangerson."

⁹⁸"Patience, my friend, patience! ⁹⁹You will find in time that it has everything to do with it. ¹⁰⁰I shall now add a little milk to make the mixture palatable, and on presenting it to the dog we find that he laps it up readily enough."

¹⁰¹As he spoke he turned the contents of the wine glass into a saucer and placed it in front of the terrier, who speedily licked it dry. ¹⁰²Sherlock Holmes' earnest demeanour had so far convinced us that we all sat in silence, watching the animal intently, and expecting some startling effect. ¹⁰³None such appeared, however. ¹⁰⁴The dog continued to lie stretched upon the cushion, breathing in a laboured way, but apparently neither the better nor the worse for its draught.

¹⁰⁵Holmes had taken out his watch, and as minute followed minute without result, an expression of the utmost chagrin and disappointment appeared upon his features. ¹⁰⁶He gnawed his lip, drummed his fingers upon the table, and showed every other symptom of acute impatience. ¹⁰⁷So great was his emotion, that I felt sincerely sorry for him, while the two detectives smiled derisively, by no means displeased at this check which he had met.

¹⁰⁸"It can't be a coincidence," he cried, at last springing from his chair and pacing wildly up and down the room; "it is impossible that it should be a mere coincidence. ¹⁰⁹The very pills which I suspected in the case of Drebber are actually found after the death of Stangerson. ¹¹⁰And yet they are inert. ¹¹¹What can it mean? ¹¹²Surely my whole chain of reasoning cannot have been false. ¹¹³It is impossible! ¹¹⁴And yet this wretched dog is none the worse. ¹¹⁵Ah, I have it! ¹¹⁶I have it!" ¹¹⁷With a perfect shriek of delight he rushed to the box, cut the other pill in two, dissolved it, added milk, and presented it to the terrier. ¹¹⁸The unfortunate creature's tongue seemed hardly to have been moistened in it before it gave a convulsive shiver in every limb, and lay as rigid and lifeless as if it had been struck by lightning.

¹¹⁹Sherlock Holmes drew a long breath, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. ¹²⁰“I should have more faith,” he said; “I ought to know by this time that when a fact appears to be opposed to a long train of deductions, it invariably proves to be capable of bearing some other interpretation. ¹²¹Of the two pills in that box one was of the most deadly poison, and the other was entirely harmless. ¹²²I ought to have known that before ever I saw the box at all.”

¹²³This last statement appeared to me to be so startling, that I could hardly believe that he was in his sober senses. ¹²⁴There was the dead dog, however, to prove that his conjecture had been correct. ¹²⁵It seemed to me that the mists in my own mind were gradually clearing away, and I began to have a dim, vague perception of the truth.

¹²⁶“All this seems strange to you,” continued Holmes, “because you failed at the beginning of the inquiry to grasp the importance of the single real clue which was presented to you. ¹²⁷I had the good fortune to seize upon that, and everything which has occurred since then has served to confirm my original supposition, and, indeed, was the logical sequence of it. ¹²⁸Hence things which have perplexed you and made the case more obscure, have served to enlighten me and to strengthen my conclusions. ¹²⁹It is a mistake to confound strangeness with mystery. ¹³⁰The most commonplace crime is often the most mysterious because it presents no new or special features from which deductions may be drawn. ¹³¹This murder would have been infinitely more difficult to unravel had the body of the victim been simply found lying in the roadway without any of those outré and sensational accompaniments which have rendered it remarkable. ¹³²These strange details, far from making the case more difficult, have really had the effect of making it less so.”

¹³³Mr. Gregson, who had listened to this address with considerable impatience, could contain himself no longer. ¹³⁴“Look here, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said, “we are all ready to acknowledge that you are a smart man, and that you have your own methods of working. ¹³⁵We want something more than mere theory and preaching now, though. ¹³⁶It is a case of taking the man. ¹³⁷I have made my case out, and it seems I was wrong. ¹³⁸Young Charpentier could not have been engaged in this second affair. ¹³⁹Lestrade went after his man, Stangerson, and it appears that he was wrong too. ¹⁴⁰You have thrown out hints here, and hints there, and seem to know more than we do, but the time has come when we feel that we have a right to ask you straight how much you do know of the business. ¹⁴¹Can you name the man who did it?”

¹⁴²“I cannot help feeling that Gregson is right, sir,” remarked Lestrade. ¹⁴³“We have both tried, and we have both failed. ¹⁴⁴You have remarked more than once since I have been in the room that you had all the evidence which you require. ¹⁴⁵Surely you will not withhold it any longer.”

¹⁴⁶“Any delay in arresting the assassin,” I observed, “might give him time to perpetrate some fresh atrocity.”

¹⁴⁷Thus pressed by us all, Holmes showed signs of irresolution. ¹⁴⁸He continued to walk up and down the room with his head sunk on his chest and his brows drawn down, as was his habit when lost in thought.

¹⁴⁹“There will be no more murders,” he said at last, stopping abruptly and facing us. ¹⁵⁰“You can put that consideration out of the question. ¹⁵¹You have asked me if I know the name of the assassin. ¹⁵²I do. ¹⁵³The mere knowing of his name is a small thing, however, compared with the power of laying our hands upon him. ¹⁵⁴This I expect very shortly to do. ¹⁵⁵I have good hopes of managing it through my own arrangements; but it is a thing which needs delicate handling, for we have a shrewd and desperate man to deal with, who is supported, as I have had occasion to prove, by another who is as clever as himself. ¹⁵⁶As long as this man has no idea that anyone can have a clue there is some chance of securing him; but if he had the slightest suspicion, he would change his name, and vanish in an instant among the four million inhabitants of this great city. ¹⁵⁷Without meaning to hurt either of your feelings, I am bound to say that I consider these men to be more than a match for the official force, and that is why I

have not asked your assistance. ¹⁵⁸If I fail I shall, of course, incur all the blame due to this omission; but that I am prepared for. ¹⁵⁹At present I am ready to promise that the instant that I can communicate with you without endangering my own combinations, I shall do so."

¹⁶⁰Gregson and Lestrade seemed to be far from satisfied by this assurance, or by the depreciating allusion to the detective police. ¹⁶¹The former had flushed up to the roots of his flaxen hair, while the other's beady eyes glistened with curiosity and resentment. ¹⁶²Neither of them had time to speak, however, before there was a tap at the door, and the spokesman of the street Arabs, young Wiggins, introduced his insignificant and unsavoury person.

¹⁶³"Please, sir," he said, touching his forelock, "I have the cab downstairs."

¹⁶⁴"Good boy," said Holmes, blandly. ¹⁶⁵"Why don't you introduce this pattern at Scotland Yard?" he continued, taking a pair of steel handcuffs from a drawer. ¹⁶⁶"See how beautifully the spring works. ¹⁶⁷They fasten in an instant."

¹⁶⁸"The old pattern is good enough," remarked Lestrade, "if we can only find the man to put them on."

¹⁶⁹"Very good, very good," said Holmes, smiling. ¹⁷⁰"The cabman may as well help me with my boxes. ¹⁷¹Just ask him to step up, Wiggins."

¹⁷²I was surprised to find my companion speaking as though he were about to set out on a journey, since he had not said anything to me about it. ¹⁷³There was a small portmanteau in the room, and this he pulled out and began to strap. ¹⁷⁴He was busily engaged at it when the cabman entered the room.

¹⁷⁵"Just give me a help with this buckle, cabman," he said, kneeling over his task, and never turning his head.

¹⁷⁶The fellow came forward with a somewhat sullen, defiant air, and put down his hands to assist. ¹⁷⁷At that instant there was a sharp click, the jangling of metal, and Sherlock Holmes sprang to his feet again.

¹⁷⁸"Gentlemen," he cried, with flashing eyes, "let me introduce you to Mr. Jefferson Hope, the murderer of Enoch Drebber and of Joseph Stangerson."

¹⁷⁹The whole thing occurred in a moment—so quickly that I had no time to realize it. ¹⁸⁰I have a vivid recollection of that instant, of Holmes' triumphant expression and the ring of his voice, of the cabman's dazed, savage face, as he glared at the glittering handcuffs, which had appeared as if by magic upon his wrists. ¹⁸¹For a second or two we might have been a group of statues. ¹⁸²Then, with an inarticulate roar of fury, the prisoner wrenched himself free from Holmes's grasp, and hurled himself through the window. ¹⁸³Woodwork and glass gave way before him; but before he got quite through, Gregson, Lestrade, and Holmes sprang upon him like so many staghounds. ¹⁸⁴He was dragged back into the room, and then commenced a terrific conflict. ¹⁸⁵So powerful and so fierce was he, that the four of us were shaken off again and again. ¹⁸⁶He appeared to have the convulsive strength of a man in an epileptic fit. ¹⁸⁷His face and hands were terribly mangled by his passage through the glass, but loss of blood had no effect in diminishing his resistance. ¹⁸⁸It was not until Lestrade succeeded in getting his hand inside his neckcloth and half-strangling him that we made him realize that his struggles were of no avail; and even then we felt no security until we had pinioned his feet as well as his hands. ¹⁸⁹That done, we rose to our feet breathless and panting.

¹⁹⁰"We have his cab," said Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁹¹"It will serve to take him to Scotland Yard. ¹⁹²And now, gentlemen," he continued, with a pleasant smile, "we have reached the end of our little mystery. ¹⁹³You are very welcome to put any questions that you like to me now, and there is no danger that I will refuse to answer them."

PART II.

The Country of the Saints.

Chapter VIII.

On The Great Alkali Plain

¹In the central portion of the great North American Continent there lies an arid and repulsive desert, which for many a long year served as a barrier against the advance of civilisation. ²From the Sierra Nevada to Nebraska, and from the Yellowstone River in the north to the Colorado upon the south, is a region of desolation and silence. ³Nor is Nature always in one mood throughout this grim district. ⁴It comprises snow-capped and lofty mountains, and dark and gloomy valleys. ⁵There are swift-flowing rivers which dash through jagged cañons; and there are enormous plains, which in winter are white with snow, and in summer are grey with the saline alkali dust. ⁶They all preserve, however, the common characteristics of barrenness, inhospitality, and misery.

⁷There are no inhabitants of this land of despair. ⁸A band of Pawnees or of Blackfeet may occasionally traverse it in order to reach other hunting-grounds, but the hardiest of the braves are glad to lose sight of those awesome plains, and to find themselves once more upon their prairies. ⁹The coyote skulks among the scrub, the buzzard flaps heavily through the air, and the clumsy grizzly bear lumbers through the dark ravines, and picks up such sustenance as it can amongst the rocks. ¹⁰These are the sole dwellers in the wilderness.

¹¹In the whole world there can be no more dreary view than that from the northern slope of the Sierra Blanco. ¹²As far as the eye can reach stretches the great flat plain-land, all dusted over with patches of alkali, and intersected by clumps of the dwarfish chaparral bushes. ¹³On the extreme verge of the horizon lie a long chain of mountain peaks, with their rugged summits flecked with snow. ¹⁴In this great stretch of country there is no sign of life, nor of anything appertaining to life. ¹⁵There is no bird in the steel-blue heaven, no movement upon the dull, grey earth—above all, there is absolute silence. ¹⁶Listen as one may, there is no shadow of a sound in all that mighty wilderness; nothing but silence—complete and heart-subduing silence.

¹⁷It has been said there is nothing appertaining to life upon the broad plain. ¹⁸That is hardly true. ¹⁹Looking down from the Sierra Blanco, one sees a pathway traced out across the desert, which winds away and is lost in the extreme distance. ²⁰It is rutted with wheels and trodden down by the feet of many adventurers. ²¹Here and there there are scattered white objects which glisten in the sun, and stand out against the dull deposit of alkali. ²²Approach, and examine them! ²³They are bones: some large and coarse, others smaller and more delicate. ²⁴The former have belonged to oxen, and the latter to men. ²⁵For fifteen hundred miles one may trace this ghastly caravan route by these scattered remains of those who had fallen by the wayside.

²⁶Looking down on this very scene, there stood upon the fourth of May, eighteen hundred and forty-seven, a solitary traveller. ²⁷His appearance was such that he might have been the very genius or demon of the region. ²⁸An observer would have found it difficult to say whether he was nearer to forty or to sixty. ²⁹His face was lean and haggard, and the brown parchment-like skin was drawn tightly over the projecting bones; his long, brown hair and beard were all flecked and dashed with white; his eyes were sunken in his head, and burned with an unnatural lustre; while the hand which grasped his rifle was hardly more fleshy than that of a skeleton. ³⁰As he stood, he leaned upon his weapon for support, and

yet his tall figure and the massive framework of his bones suggested a wiry and vigorous constitution. ³¹His gaunt face, however, and his clothes, which hung so baggily over his shrivelled limbs, proclaimed what it was that gave him that senile and decrepit appearance. ³²The man was dying—dying from hunger and from thirst.

³³He had toiled painfully down the ravine, and on to this little elevation, in the vain hope of seeing some signs of water. ³⁴Now the great salt plain stretched before his eyes, and the distant belt of savage mountains, without a sign anywhere of plant or tree, which might indicate the presence of moisture. ³⁵In all that broad landscape there was no gleam of hope. ³⁶North, and east, and west he looked with wild questioning eyes, and then he realised that his wanderings had come to an end, and that there, on that barren crag, he was about to die. ³⁷“Why not here, as well as in a feather bed, twenty years hence,” he muttered, as he seated himself in the shelter of a boulder.

³⁸Before sitting down, he had deposited upon the ground his useless rifle, and also a large bundle tied up in a grey shawl, which he had carried slung over his right shoulder. ³⁹It appeared to be somewhat too heavy for his strength, for in lowering it, it came down on the ground with some little violence. ⁴⁰Instantly there broke from the grey parcel a little moaning cry, and from it there protruded a small, scared face, with very bright brown eyes, and two little speckled, dimpled fists.

⁴¹“You've hurt me!” said a childish voice reproachfully.

⁴²“Have I though,” the man answered penitently, “I didn't go for to do it.” ⁴³As he spoke he unwrapped the grey shawl and extricated a pretty little girl of about five years of age, whose dainty shoes and smart pink frock with its little linen apron all bespoke a mother's care. ⁴⁴The child was pale and wan, but her healthy arms and legs showed that she had suffered less than her companion.

⁴⁵“How is it now?” he answered anxiously, for she was still rubbing the towsy golden curls which covered the back of her head.

⁴⁶“Kiss it and make it well,” she said, with perfect gravity, shoving the injured part up to him. ⁴⁷“That's what mother used to do. ⁴⁸Where's mother?”

⁴⁹“Mother's gone. ⁵⁰I guess you'll see her before long.”

⁵¹“Gone, eh!” said the little girl. ⁵²“Funny, she didn't say good-bye; she 'most always did if she was just goin' over to Auntie's for tea, and now she's been away three days. ⁵³Say, it's awful dry, ain't it? ⁵⁴Ain't there no water, nor nothing to eat?”

⁵⁵“No, there ain't nothing, dearie. ⁵⁶You'll just need to be patient awhile, and then you'll be all right. ⁵⁷Put your head up agin me like that, and then you'll feel bullier. ⁵⁸It ain't easy to talk when your lips is like leather, but I guess I'd best let you know how the cards lie. ⁵⁹What's that you've got?”

⁶⁰“Pretty things! fine things!” cried the little girl enthusiastically, holding up two glittering fragments of mica. ⁶¹“When we goes back to home I'll give them to brother Bob.”

⁶²“You'll see prettier things than them soon,” said the man confidently. ⁶³“You just wait a bit. ⁶⁴I was going to tell you though—you remember when we left the river?”

⁶⁵“Oh, yes.”

⁶⁶“Well, we reckoned we'd strike another river soon, d'ye see. ⁶⁷But there was somethin' wrong; compasses, or map, or somethin', and it didn't turn up. ⁶⁸Water ran out. ⁶⁹Just except a little drop for the likes of you and—and—”

⁷⁰“And you couldn't wash yourself,” interrupted his companion gravely, staring up at his grimy visage.

⁷¹“No, nor drink. ⁷²And Mr. Bender, he was the fust to go, and then Indian Pete, and then Mrs. McGregor, and then Johnny Hones, and then, dearie, your mother.”

⁷³“Then mother's a deader too,” cried the little girl dropping her face in her pinafore and sobbing bitterly.

⁷⁴“Yes, they all went except you and me. ⁷⁵Then I thought there was some chance of water in this direction, so I heaved you over my shoulder and we tramped it together. ⁷⁶It don't seem as though we've improved matters. ⁷⁷There's an almighty small chance for us now!”

⁷⁸“Do you mean that we are going to die too?” asked the child, checking her sobs, and raising her tear-stained face.

⁷⁹“I guess that's about the size of it.”

⁸⁰“Why didn't you say so before?” she said, laughing gleefully. ⁸¹“You gave me such a fright. ⁸²Why, of course, now as long as we die we'll be with mother again.”

⁸³“Yes, you will, dearie.”

⁸⁴“And you too. ⁸⁵I'll tell her how awful good you've been. ⁸⁶I'll bet she meets us at the door of Heaven with a big pitcher of water, and a lot of buckwheat cakes, hot, and toasted on both sides, like Bob and me was fond of. ⁸⁷How long will it be first?”

⁸⁸“I don't know—not very long.” ⁸⁹The man's eyes were fixed upon the northern horizon. ⁹⁰In the blue vault of the heaven there had appeared three little specks which increased in size every moment, so rapidly did they approach. ⁹¹They speedily resolved themselves into three large brown birds, which circled over the heads of the two wanderers, and then settled upon some rocks which overlooked them. ⁹²They were buzzards, the vultures of the west, whose coming is the forerunner of death.

⁹³“Cocks and hens,” cried the little girl gleefully, pointing at their ill-omened forms, and clapping her hands to make them rise. ⁹⁴“Say, did God make this country?”

⁹⁵“Of course He did,” said her companion, rather startled by this unexpected question.

⁹⁶“He made the country down in Illinois, and He made the Missouri,” the little girl continued. ⁹⁷“I guess somebody else made the country in these parts. ⁹⁸It's not nearly so well done. ⁹⁹They forgot the water and the trees.”

¹⁰⁰“What would ye think of offering up prayer?” the man asked diffidently.

¹⁰¹“It ain't night yet,” she answered.

¹⁰²“It don't matter. ¹⁰³It ain't quite regular, but He won't mind that, you bet. ¹⁰⁴You say over them ones that you used to say every night in the waggon when we was on the Plains.”

¹⁰⁵“Why don't you say some yourself?” the child asked, with wondering eyes.

¹⁰⁶“I disremember them,” he answered. ¹⁰⁷“I hain't said none since I was half the height o' that gun. ¹⁰⁸I guess it's never too late. ¹⁰⁹You say them out, and I'll stand by and come in on the choruses.”

¹¹⁰“Then you'll need to kneel down, and me too,” she said, laying the shawl out for that purpose.

¹¹¹“You've got to put your hands up like this. ¹¹²It makes you feel kind o' good.”

¹¹³It was a strange sight had there been anything but the buzzards to see it. ¹¹⁴Side by side on the narrow shawl knelt the two wanderers, the little prattling child and the reckless, hardened adventurer. ¹¹⁵Her chubby face, and his haggard, angular visage were both turned up to the cloudless heaven in heartfelt entreaty to that dread being with whom they were face to face, while the two voices—the one thin and clear, the other deep and harsh—united in the entreaty for mercy and forgiveness. ¹¹⁶The prayer finished,

they resumed their seat in the shadow of the boulder until the child fell asleep, nestling upon the broad breast of her protector. ¹¹⁷He watched over her slumber for some time, but Nature proved to be too strong for him. ¹¹⁸For three days and three nights he had allowed himself neither rest nor repose. ¹¹⁹Slowly the eyelids drooped over the tired eyes, and the head sunk lower and lower upon the breast, until the man's grizzled beard was mixed with the gold tresses of his companion, and both slept the same deep and dreamless slumber.

¹²⁰Had the wanderer remained awake for another half hour a strange sight would have met his eyes. ¹²¹Far away on the extreme verge of the alkali plain there rose up a little spray of dust, very slight at first, and hardly to be distinguished from the mists of the distance, but gradually growing higher and broader until it formed a solid, well-defined cloud. ¹²²This cloud continued to increase in size until it became evident that it could only be raised by a great multitude of moving creatures. ¹²³In more fertile spots the observer would have come to the conclusion that one of those great herds of bisons which graze upon the prairie land was approaching him. ¹²⁴This was obviously impossible in these arid wilds. ¹²⁵As the whirl of dust drew nearer to the solitary bluff upon which the two castaways were reposing, the canvas-covered tilts of waggons and the figures of armed horsemen began to show up through the haze, and the apparition revealed itself as being a great caravan upon its journey for the West. ¹²⁶But what a caravan! ¹²⁷When the head of it had reached the base of the mountains, the rear was not yet visible on the horizon. ¹²⁸Right across the enormous plain stretched the straggling array, waggons and carts, men on horseback, and men on foot. ¹²⁹Innumerable women who staggered along under burdens, and children who toddled beside the waggons or peeped out from under the white coverings. ¹³⁰This was evidently no ordinary party of immigrants, but rather some nomad people who had been compelled from stress of circumstances to seek themselves a new country. ¹³¹There rose through the clear air a confused clattering and rumbling from this great mass of humanity, with the creaking of wheels and the neighing of horses. ¹³²Loud as it was, it was not sufficient to rouse the two tired wayfarers above them.

¹³³At the head of the column there rode a score or more of grave ironfaced men, clad in sombre homespun garments and armed with rifles. ¹³⁴On reaching the base of the bluff they halted, and held a short council among themselves.

¹³⁵"The wells are to the right, my brothers," said one, a hard-lipped, clean-shaven man with grizzly hair.

¹³⁶"To the right of the Sierra Blanco—so we shall reach the Rio Grande," said another.

¹³⁷"Fear not for water," cried a third. ¹³⁸"He who could draw it from the rocks will not now abandon His own chosen people."

¹³⁹"Amen! Amen!" responded the whole party.

¹⁴⁰They were about to resume their journey when one of the youngest and keenest-eyed uttered an exclamation and pointed up at the rugged crag above them. ¹⁴¹From its summit there fluttered a little wisp of pink, showing up hard and bright against the grey rocks behind. ¹⁴²At the sight there was a general reining up of horses and unslinging of guns, while fresh horsemen came galloping up to reinforce the vanguard. ¹⁴³The word "Redskins" was on every lip.

¹⁴⁴"There can't be any number of Injuns here," said the elderly man who appeared to be in command.

¹⁴⁵"We have passed the Pawnees, and there are no other tribes until we cross the great mountains."

¹⁴⁶"Shall I go forward and see, Brother Stangerson," asked one of the band.

¹⁴⁷"And I," "and I," cried a dozen voices.

¹⁴⁸"Leave your horses below and we will await you here," the Elder answered. ¹⁴⁹In a moment the young fellows had dismounted, fastened their horses, and were ascending the precipitous slope which led up to the object which had excited their curiosity. ¹⁵⁰They advanced rapidly and noiselessly, with the

confidence and dexterity of practised scouts. ¹⁵¹The watchers from the plain below could see them flit from rock to rock until their figures stood out against the skyline. ¹⁵²The young man who had first given the alarm was leading them. ¹⁵³Suddenly his followers saw him throw up his hands, as though overcome with astonishment, and on joining him they were affected in the same way by the sight which met their eyes.

¹⁵⁴On the little plateau which crowned the barren hill there stood a single giant boulder, and against this boulder there lay a tall man, long-bearded and hard-featured, but of an excessive thinness. ¹⁵⁵His placid face and regular breathing showed that he was fast asleep. ¹⁵⁶Beside him lay a little child, with her round white arms encircling his brown sinewy neck, and her golden haired head resting upon the breast of his velveteen tunic. ¹⁵⁷Her rosy lips were parted, showing the regular line of snow-white teeth within, and a playful smile played over her infantile features. ¹⁵⁸Her plump little white legs terminating in white socks and neat shoes with shining buckles, offered a strange contrast to the long shrivelled members of her companion. ¹⁵⁹On the ledge of rock above this strange couple there stood three solemn buzzards, who, at the sight of the new comers uttered raucous screams of disappointment and flapped sullenly away.

¹⁶⁰The cries of the foul birds awoke the two sleepers who stared about them in bewilderment. ¹⁶¹The man staggered to his feet and looked down upon the plain which had been so desolate when sleep had overtaken him, and which was now traversed by this enormous body of men and of beasts. ¹⁶²His face assumed an expression of incredulity as he gazed, and he passed his boney hand over his eyes. ¹⁶³“This is what they call delirium, I guess,” he muttered. ¹⁶⁴The child stood beside him, holding on to the skirt of his coat, and said nothing but looked all round her with the wondering questioning gaze of childhood.

¹⁶⁵The rescuing party were speedily able to convince the two castaways that their appearance was no delusion. ¹⁶⁶One of them seized the little girl, and hoisted her upon his shoulder, while two others supported her gaunt companion, and assisted him towards the waggons.

¹⁶⁷“My name is John Ferrier,” the wanderer explained; “me and that little un are all that's left o' twenty-one people. ¹⁶⁸The rest is all dead o' thirst and hunger away down in the south.”

¹⁶⁹“Is she your child?” asked someone.

¹⁷⁰“I guess she is now,” the other cried, defiantly; “she's mine 'cause I saved her. ¹⁷¹No man will take her from me. ¹⁷²She's Lucy Ferrier from this day on. ¹⁷³Who are you, though?” he continued, glancing with curiosity at his stalwart, sunburned rescuers; “there seems to be a powerful lot of ye.”

¹⁷⁴“Nigh upon ten thousand,” said one of the young men; “we are the persecuted children of God—the chosen of the Angel Merona.”

¹⁷⁵“I never heard tell on him,” said the wanderer. ¹⁷⁶“He appears to have chosen a fair crowd of ye.”

¹⁷⁷“Do not jest at that which is sacred,” said the other sternly. ¹⁷⁸“We are of those who believe in those sacred writings, drawn in Egyptian letters on plates of beaten gold, which were handed unto the holy Joseph Smith at Palmyra. ¹⁷⁹We have come from Nauvoo, in the State of Illinois, where we had founded our temple. ¹⁸⁰We have come to seek a refuge from the violent man and from the godless, even though it be the heart of the desert.”

¹⁸¹The name of Nauvoo evidently recalled recollections to John Ferrier. ¹⁸²“I see,” he said, “you are the Mormons.”

¹⁸³“We are the Mormons,” answered his companions with one voice.

¹⁸⁴“And where are you going?”

¹⁸⁵“We do not know. ¹⁸⁶The hand of God is leading us under the person of our Prophet. ¹⁸⁷You must come before him. ¹⁸⁸He shall say what is to be done with you.”

¹⁸⁹They had reached the base of the hill by this time, and were surrounded by crowds of the pilgrims—pale-faced meek-looking women, strong laughing children, and anxious earnest-eyed men. ¹⁹⁰Many were the cries of astonishment and of commiseration which arose from them when they perceived the youth of one of the strangers and the destitution of the other. ¹⁹¹Their escort did not halt, however, but pushed on, followed by a great crowd of Mormons, until they reached a waggon, which was conspicuous for its great size and for the gaudiness and smartness of its appearance. ¹⁹²Six horses were yoked to it, whereas the others were furnished with two, or, at most, four a-piece. ¹⁹³Beside the driver there sat a man who could not have been more than thirty years of age, but whose massive head and resolute expression marked him as a leader. ¹⁹⁴He was reading a brown-backed volume, but as the crowd approached he laid it aside, and listened attentively to an account of the episode. ¹⁹⁵Then he turned to the two castaways.

¹⁹⁶“If we take you with us,” he said, in solemn words, “it can only be as believers in our own creed. ¹⁹⁷We shall have no wolves in our fold. ¹⁹⁸Better far that your bones should bleach in this wilderness than that you should prove to be that little speck of decay which in time corrupts the whole fruit. ¹⁹⁸Will you come with us on these terms?”

¹⁹⁹“Guess I’ll come with you on any terms,” said Ferrier, with such emphasis that the grave Elders could not restrain a smile. ²⁰⁰The leader alone retained his stern, impressive expression.

²⁰¹“Take him, Brother Stangerson,” he said, “give him food and drink, and the child likewise. ²⁰²Let it be your task also to teach him our holy creed. ²⁰³We have delayed long enough. ²⁰⁴Forward! ²⁰⁵On, on to Zion!”

²⁰⁶“On, on to Zion!” cried the crowd of Mormons, and the words rippled down the long caravan, passing from mouth to mouth until they died away in a dull murmur in the far distance. ²⁰⁷With a cracking of whips and a creaking of wheels the great waggons got into motion, and soon the whole caravan was winding along once more. ²⁰⁸The Elder to whose care the two waifs had been committed, led them to his waggon, where a meal was already awaiting them.

²⁰⁹“You shall remain here,” he said. ²¹⁰“In a few days you will have recovered from your fatigues. ²¹¹In the meantime, remember that now and forever you are of our religion. ²¹²Brigham Young has said it, and he has spoken with the voice of Joseph Smith, which is the voice of God.”

Chapter IX.

The Flower Of Utah

¹This is not the place to commemorate the trials and privations endured by the immigrant Mormons before they came to their final haven. ²From the shores of the Mississippi to the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains they had struggled on with a constancy almost unparalleled in history. ³The savage man, and the savage beast, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and disease—every impediment which Nature could place in the way—had all been overcome with Anglo-Saxon tenacity. ⁴Yet the long journey and the accumulated terrors had shaken the hearts of the stoutest among them. ⁵There was not one who did not sink upon his knees in heartfelt prayer when they saw the broad valley of Utah bathed in the sunlight beneath them, and learned from the lips of their leader that this was the promised land, and that these virgin acres were to be theirs for evermore.

⁶Young speedily proved himself to be a skilful administrator as well as a resolute chief. ⁷Maps were drawn and charts prepared, in which the future city was sketched out. ⁸All around farms were apportioned and allotted in proportion to the standing of each individual. ⁹The tradesman was put to his trade and the artisan to his calling. ¹⁰In the town streets and squares sprang up, as if by magic. ¹¹In the country there was draining and hedging, planting and clearing, until the next summer saw the whole country golden with the wheat crop. ¹²Everything prospered in the strange settlement. ¹³Above all, the great temple which they had erected in the centre of the city grew ever taller and larger. ¹⁴From the first blush of dawn until the closing of the twilight, the clatter of the hammer and the rasp of the saw was never absent from the monument which the immigrants erected to Him who had led them safe through many dangers.

¹⁵The two castaways, John Ferrier and the little girl who had shared his fortunes and had been adopted as his daughter, accompanied the Mormons to the end of their great pilgrimage. ¹⁶Little Lucy Ferrier was borne along pleasantly enough in Elder Stangerson's waggon, a retreat which she shared with the Mormon's three wives and with his son, a headstrong forward boy of twelve. ¹⁷Having rallied, with the elasticity of childhood, from the shock caused by her mother's death, she soon became a pet with the women, and reconciled herself to this new life in her moving canvas-covered home. ¹⁸In the meantime Ferrier having recovered from his privations, distinguished himself as a useful guide and an indefatigable hunter. ¹⁹So rapidly did he gain the esteem of his new companions, that when they reached the end of their wanderings, it was unanimously agreed that he should be provided with as large and as fertile a tract of land as any of the settlers, with the exception of Young himself, and of Stangerson, Kemball, Johnston, and Drebber, who were the four principal Elders.

²⁰On the farm thus acquired John Ferrier built himself a substantial log-house, which received so many additions in succeeding years that it grew into a roomy villa. ²¹He was a man of a practical turn of mind, keen in his dealings and skilful with his hands. ²²His iron constitution enabled him to work morning and evening at improving and tilling his lands. ²³Hence it came about that his farm and all that belonged to him prospered exceedingly. ²⁴In three years he was better off than his neighbours, in six he was well-to-do, in nine he was rich, and in twelve there were not half a dozen men in the whole of Salt Lake City who could compare with him. ²⁵From the great inland sea to the distant Wahsatch Mountains there was no name better known than that of John Ferrier.

²⁶There was one way and only one in which he offended the susceptibilities of his co-religionists. ²⁷No argument or persuasion could ever induce him to set up a female establishment after the manner of his companions. ²⁸He never gave reasons for this persistent refusal, but contented himself by resolutely and inflexibly adhering to his determination. ²⁹There were some who accused him of lukewarmness in his adopted religion, and others who put it down to greed of wealth and reluctance to incur expense.

³⁰Others, again, spoke of some early love affair, and of a fair-haired girl who had pined away on the shores of the Atlantic. ³¹Whatever the reason, Ferrier remained strictly celibate. ³²In every other respect he conformed to the religion of the young settlement, and gained the name of being an orthodox and straight-walking man.

³³Lucy Ferrier grew up within the log-house, and assisted her adopted father in all his undertakings.

³⁴The keen air of the mountains and the balsamic odour of the pine trees took the place of nurse and mother to the young girl. ³⁵As year succeeded to year she grew taller and stronger, her cheek more ruddy, and her step more elastic. ³⁶Many a wayfarer upon the high road which ran by Ferrier's farm felt long-forgotten thoughts revive in their mind as they watched her lithe girlish figure tripping through the wheatfields, or met her mounted upon her father's mustang, and managing it with all the ease and grace of a true child of the West. ³⁷So the bud blossomed into a flower, and the year which saw her father the richest of the farmers left her as fair a specimen of American girlhood as could be found in the whole Pacific slope.

³⁸It was not the father, however, who first discovered that the child had developed into the woman. ³⁹It seldom is in such cases. ⁴⁰That mysterious change is too subtle and too gradual to be measured by dates.

⁴¹Least of all does the maiden herself know it until the tone of a voice or the touch of a hand sets her heart thrilling within her, and she learns, with a mixture of pride and of fear, that a new and a larger nature has awoken within her. ⁴²There are few who cannot recall that day and remember the one little incident which heralded the dawn of a new life. ⁴³In the case of Lucy Ferrier the occasion was serious enough in itself, apart from its future influence on her destiny and that of many besides.

⁴⁴It was a warm June morning, and the Latter Day Saints were as busy as the bees whose hive they have chosen for their emblem. ⁴⁵In the fields and in the streets rose the same hum of human industry. ⁴⁶Down the dusty high roads defiled long streams of heavily-laden mules, all heading to the west, for the gold fever had broken out in California, and the Overland Route lay through the City of the Elect. ⁴⁷There, too, were droves of sheep and bullocks coming in from the outlying pasture lands, and trains of tired immigrants, men and horses equally weary of their interminable journey. ⁴⁸Through all this motley assemblage, threading her way with the skill of an accomplished rider, there galloped Lucy Ferrier, her fair face flushed with the exercise and her long chestnut hair floating out behind her. ⁴⁹She had a commission from her father in the City, and was dashing in as she had done many a time before, with all the fearlessness of youth, thinking only of her task and how it was to be performed. ⁵⁰The travel-stained adventurers gazed after her in astonishment, and even the unemotional Indians, journeying in with their pelties, relaxed their accustomed stoicism as they marvelled at the beauty of the pale-faced maiden.

⁵¹She had reached the outskirts of the city when she found the road blocked by a great drove of cattle, driven by a half-dozen wild-looking herdsmen from the plains. ⁵²In her impatience she endeavoured to pass this obstacle by pushing her horse into what appeared to be a gap. ⁵³Scarcely had she got fairly into it, however, before the beasts closed in behind her, and she found herself completely imbedded in the moving stream of fierce-eyed, long-horned bullocks. ⁵⁴Accustomed as she was to deal with cattle, she was not alarmed at her situation, but took advantage of every opportunity to urge her horse on in the hopes of pushing her way through the cavalcade. ⁵⁵Unfortunately the horns of one of the creatures, either by accident or design, came in violent contact with the flank of the mustang, and excited it to madness. ⁵⁶In an instant it reared up upon its hind legs with a snort of rage, and pranced and tossed in a way that would have unseated any but a most skilful rider. ⁵⁷The situation was full of peril. ⁵⁸Every plunge of the excited horse brought it against the horns again, and goaded it to fresh madness. ⁵⁹It was all that the girl could do to keep herself in the saddle, yet a slip would mean a terrible death under the hoofs of the unwieldy and terrified animals. ⁶⁰Unaccustomed to sudden emergencies, her head began to swim, and her grip upon the bridle to relax. ⁶¹Choked by the rising cloud of dust and by the steam from the struggling creatures, she might have abandoned her efforts in despair, but for a kindly voice at her

elbow which assured her of assistance. ⁶²At the same moment a sinewy brown hand caught the frightened horse by the curb, and forcing a way through the drove, soon brought her to the outskirts.

⁶³“You're not hurt, I hope, miss,” said her preserver, respectfully.

⁶⁴She looked up at his dark, fierce face, and laughed saucily. ⁶⁵“I'm awful frightened,” she said, naively; “whoever would have thought that Poncho would have been so scared by a lot of cows?”

⁶⁶“Thank God you kept your seat,” the other said earnestly. ⁶⁷He was a tall, savage-looking young fellow, mounted on a powerful roan horse, and clad in the rough dress of a hunter, with a long rifle slung over his shoulders. ⁶⁸“I guess you are the daughter of John Ferrier,” he remarked, “I saw you ride down from his house. ⁶⁹When you see him, ask him if he remembers the Jefferson Hopes of St. Louis. ⁷⁰If he's the same Ferrier, my father and he were pretty thick.”

⁷¹“Hadn't you better come and ask yourself?” she asked, demurely.

⁷²The young fellow seemed pleased at the suggestion, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure. ⁷³“I'll do so,” he said, “we've been in the mountains for two months, and are not over and above in visiting condition. ⁷⁴He must take us as he finds us.”

⁷⁵“He has a good deal to thank you for, and so have I,” she answered, “he's awful fond of me. ⁷⁶If those cows had jumped on me he'd have never got over it.”

⁷⁷“Neither would I,” said her companion.

⁷⁸“You! ⁷⁹Well, I don't see that it would make much matter to you, anyhow. ⁸⁰You ain't even a friend of ours.”

⁸¹The young hunter's dark face grew so gloomy over this remark that Lucy Ferrier laughed aloud.

⁸²“There, I didn't mean that,” she said; “of course, you are a friend now. ⁸³You must come and see us. ⁸⁴Now I must push along, or father won't trust me with his business any more. ⁸⁵Good-bye!”

⁸⁶“Good-bye,” he answered, raising his broad sombrero, and bending over her little hand. ⁸⁷She wheeled her mustang round, gave it a cut with her riding-whip, and darted away down the broad road in a rolling cloud of dust.

⁸⁸Young Jefferson Hope rode on with his companions, gloomy and taciturn. ⁸⁹He and they had been among the Nevada Mountains prospecting for silver, and were returning to Salt Lake City in the hope of raising capital enough to work some lodes which they had discovered. ⁹⁰He had been as keen as any of them upon the business until this sudden incident had drawn his thoughts into another channel. ⁹¹The sight of the fair young girl, as frank and wholesome as the Sierra breezes, had stirred his volcanic, untamed heart to its very depths. ⁹²When she had vanished from his sight, he realized that a crisis had come in his life, and that neither silver speculations nor any other questions could ever be of such importance to him as this new and all-absorbing one. ⁹³The love which had sprung up in his heart was not the sudden, changeable fancy of a boy, but rather the wild, fierce passion of a man of strong will and imperious temper. ⁹⁴He had been accustomed to succeed in all that he undertook. ⁹⁵He swore in his heart that he would not fail in this if human effort and human perseverance could render him successful.

⁹⁶He called on John Ferrier that night, and many times again, until his face was a familiar one at the farm-house. ⁹⁷John, cooped up in the valley, and absorbed in his work, had had little chance of learning the news of the outside world during the last twelve years. ⁹⁸All this Jefferson Hope was able to tell him, and in a style which interested Lucy as well as her father. ⁹⁹He had been a pioneer in California, and could narrate many a strange tale of fortunes made and fortunes lost in those wild, halcyon days. ¹⁰⁰He had been a scout too, and a trapper, a silver explorer, and a ranchman. ¹⁰¹Wherever stirring adventures were to be had, Jefferson Hope had been there in search of them. ¹⁰²He soon became a

favourite with the old farmer, who spoke eloquently of his virtues. ¹⁰³On such occasions, Lucy was silent, but her blushing cheek and her bright, happy eyes, showed only too clearly that her young heart was no longer her own. ¹⁰⁴Her honest father may not have observed these symptoms, but they were assuredly not thrown away upon the man who had won her affections.

¹⁰⁵It was a summer evening when he came galloping down the road and pulled up at the gate. ¹⁰⁶She was at the doorway, and came down to meet him. ¹⁰⁷He threw the bridle over the fence and strode up the pathway.

¹⁰⁸"I am off, Lucy," he said, taking her two hands in his, and gazing tenderly down into her face; "I won't ask you to come with me now, but will you be ready to come when I am here again?"

¹⁰⁹"And when will that be?" she asked, blushing and laughing.

¹¹⁰"A couple of months at the outside. ¹¹¹I will come and claim you then, my darling. ¹¹²There's no one who can stand between us."

¹¹³"And how about father?" she asked.

¹¹⁴"He has given his consent, provided we get these mines working all right. ¹¹⁵I have no fear on that head."

¹¹⁶"Oh, well; of course, if you and father have arranged it all, there's no more to be said," she whispered, with her cheek against his broad breast.

¹¹⁷"Thank God!" he said, hoarsely, stooping and kissing her. ¹¹⁸"It is settled, then. ¹¹⁹The longer I stay, the harder it will be to go. ¹²⁰They are waiting for me at the cañon. ¹²¹Good-bye, my own darling—good-bye. ¹²²In two months you shall see me."

¹²³He tore himself from her as he spoke, and, flinging himself upon his horse, galloped furiously away, never even looking round, as though afraid that his resolution might fail him if he took one glance at what he was leaving. ¹²⁴She stood at the gate, gazing after him until he vanished from her sight. ¹²⁵Then she walked back into the house, the happiest girl in all Utah.

Chapter X.

John Ferrier Talks With The Prophet

¹Three weeks had passed since Jefferson Hope and his comrades had departed from Salt Lake City. ²John Ferrier's heart was sore within him when he thought of the young man's return, and of the impending loss of his adopted child. ³Yet her bright and happy face reconciled him to the arrangement more than any argument could have done. ⁴He had always determined, deep down in his resolute heart, that nothing would ever induce him to allow his daughter to wed a Mormon. ⁵Such a marriage he regarded as no marriage at all, but as a shame and a disgrace. ⁶Whatever he might think of the Mormon doctrines, upon that one point he was inflexible. ⁷He had to seal his mouth on the subject, however, for to express an unorthodox opinion was a dangerous matter in those days in the Land of the Saints.

⁸Yes, a dangerous matter—so dangerous that even the most saintly dared only whisper their religious opinions with bated breath, lest something which fell from their lips might be misconstrued, and bring down a swift retribution upon them. ⁹The victims of persecution had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description. ¹⁰Not the Inquisition of Seville, nor the German Vehmgericht, nor the Secret Societies of Italy, were ever able to put a more formidable machinery in motion than that which cast a cloud over the State of Utah.

¹¹Its invisibility, and the mystery which was attached to it, made this organization doubly terrible. ¹²It appeared to be omniscient and omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard. ¹³The man who held out against the Church vanished away, and none knew whither he had gone or what had befallen him. ¹⁴His wife and his children awaited him at home, but no father ever returned to tell them how he had fared at the hands of his secret judges. ¹⁵A rash word or a hasty act was followed by annihilation, and yet none knew what the nature might be of this terrible power which was suspended over them. ¹⁶No wonder that men went about in fear and trembling, and that even in the heart of the wilderness they dared not whisper the doubts which oppressed them.

¹⁷At first this vague and terrible power was exercised only upon the recalcitrants who, having embraced the Mormon faith, wished afterwards to pervert or to abandon it. ¹⁸Soon, however, it took a wider range. ¹⁹The supply of adult women was running short, and polygamy without a female population on which to draw was a barren doctrine indeed. ²⁰Strange rumours began to be bandied about—rumours of murdered immigrants and rifled camps in regions where Indians had never been seen. ²¹Fresh women appeared in the harems of the Elders—women who pined and wept, and bore upon their faces the traces of an unextinguishable horror. ²²Belated wanderers upon the mountains spoke of gangs of armed men, masked, stealthy, and noiseless, who flitted by them in the darkness. ²³These tales and rumours took substance and shape, and were corroborated and re-corroborated, until they resolved themselves into a definite name. ²⁴To this day, in the lonely ranches of the West, the name of the Danite Band, or the Avenging Angels, is a sinister and an ill-omened one.

²⁵Fuller knowledge of the organization which produced such terrible results served to increase rather than to lessen the horror which it inspired in the minds of men. ²⁶None knew who belonged to this ruthless society. ²⁷The names of the participators in the deeds of blood and violence done under the name of religion were kept profoundly secret. ²⁸The very friend to whom you communicated your misgivings as to the Prophet and his mission, might be one of those who would come forth at night with fire and sword to exact a terrible reparation. ²⁹Hence every man feared his neighbour, and none spoke of the things which were nearest his heart.

³⁰One fine morning, John Ferrier was about to set out to his wheatfields, when he heard the click of the latch, and, looking through the window, saw a stout, sandy-haired, middle-aged man coming up the

pathway. ³¹His heart leapt to his mouth, for this was none other than the great Brigham Young himself.

³²Full of trepidation—for he knew that such a visit boded him little good—Ferrier ran to the door to greet the Mormon chief. ³³The latter, however, received his salutations coldly, and followed him with a stern face into the sitting-room.

³⁴“Brother Ferrier,” he said, taking a seat, and eyeing the farmer keenly from under his light-coloured eyelashes, “the true believers have been good friends to you. ³⁵We picked you up when you were starving in the desert, we shared our food with you, led you safe to the Chosen Valley, gave you a goodly share of land, and allowed you to wax rich under our protection. ³⁶Is not this so?”

³⁷“It is so,” answered John Ferrier.

³⁸“In return for all this we asked but one condition: that was, that you should embrace the true faith, and conform in every way to its usages. ³⁹This you promised to do, and this, if common report says truly, you have neglected.”

⁴⁰“And how have I neglected it?” asked Ferrier, throwing out his hands in expostulation. ⁴¹“Have I not given to the common fund? ⁴²Have I not attended at the Temple? ⁴³Have I not—?”

⁴⁴“Where are your wives?” asked Young, looking round him. ⁴⁵“Call them in, that I may greet them.”

⁴⁶“It is true that I have not married,” Ferrier answered. ⁴⁷“But women were few, and there were many who had better claims than I. ⁴⁸I was not a lonely man: I had my daughter to attend to my wants.”

⁴⁹“It is of that daughter that I would speak to you,” said the leader of the Mormons. ⁵⁰“She has grown to be the flower of Utah, and has found favour in the eyes of many who are high in the land.”

⁵¹John Ferrier groaned internally.

⁵²“There are stories of her which I would fain disbelieve—stories that she is sealed to some Gentile.

⁵³This must be the gossip of idle tongues. ⁵⁴What is the thirteenth rule in the code of the sainted Joseph Smith? ⁵⁵‘Let every maiden of the true faith marry one of the elect; for if she wed a Gentile, she commits a grievous sin.’ ⁵⁶This being so, it is impossible that you, who profess the holy creed, should suffer your daughter to violate it.”

⁵⁷John Ferrier made no answer, but he played nervously with his riding-whip.

⁵⁸“Upon this one point your whole faith shall be tested—so it has been decided in the Sacred Council of Four. ⁵⁹The girl is young, and we would not have her wed grey hairs, neither would we deprive her of all choice. ⁶⁰We Elders have many heifers, but our children must also be provided. ⁶¹Stangerson has a son, and Drebber has a son, and either of them would gladly welcome your daughter to their house. ⁶²Let her choose between them. ⁶³They are young and rich, and of the true faith. ⁶⁴What say you to that?”

⁶⁵Ferrier remained silent for some little time with his brows knitted.

⁶⁶“You will give us time,” he said at last. ⁶⁷“My daughter is very young—she is scarce of an age to marry.”

⁶⁸“She shall have a month to choose,” said Young, rising from his seat. ⁶⁹“At the end of that time she shall give her answer.”

⁷⁰He was passing through the door, when he turned, with flushed face and flashing eyes. ⁷¹“It were better for you, John Ferrier,” he thundered, “that you and she were now lying blanched skeletons upon the Sierra Blanco, than that you should put your weak wills against the orders of the Holy Four!”

⁷²With a threatening gesture of his hand, he turned from the door, and Ferrier heard his heavy step scrunching along the shingly path.

⁷³He was still sitting with his elbows upon his knees, considering how he should broach the matter to his daughter when a soft hand was laid upon his, and looking up, he saw her standing beside him. ⁷⁴One glance at her pale, frightened face showed him that she had heard what had passed.

⁷⁵"I could not help it," she said, in answer to his look. ⁷⁶"His voice rang through the house. ⁷⁷Oh, father, father, what shall we do?"

⁷⁸"Don't you scare yourself," he answered, drawing her to him, and passing his broad, rough hand caressingly over her chestnut hair. ⁷⁹"We'll fix it up somehow or another. ⁸⁰You don't find your fancy kind o' lessening for this chap, do you?"

⁸¹A sob and a squeeze of his hand was her only answer.

⁸²"No; of course not. ⁸³I shouldn't care to hear you say you did. ⁸⁴He's a likely lad, and he's a Christian, which is more than these folk here, in spite o' all their praying and preaching. ⁸⁵There's a party starting for Nevada to-morrow, and I'll manage to send him a message letting him know the hole we are in. ⁸⁶If I know anything o' that young man, he'll be back here with a speed that would whip electro-telegraphs."

⁸⁷Lucy laughed through her tears at her father's description.

⁸⁸"When he comes, he will advise us for the best. ⁸⁹But it is for you that I am frightened, dear. ⁹⁰One hears—one hears such dreadful stories about those who oppose the Prophet: something terrible always happens to them."

⁹¹"But we haven't opposed him yet," her father answered. ⁹²"It will be time to look out for squalls when we do. ⁹³We have a clear month before us; at the end of that, I guess we had best shin out of Utah."

⁹⁴"Leave Utah!"

⁹⁵"That's about the size of it."

⁹⁶"But the farm?"

⁹⁷"We will raise as much as we can in money, and let the rest go. ⁹⁸To tell the truth, Lucy, it isn't the first time I have thought of doing it. ⁹⁹I don't care about knuckling under to any man, as these folk do to their darned prophet. ¹⁰⁰I'm a free-born American, and it's all new to me. ¹⁰¹Guess I'm too old to learn. ¹⁰²If he comes browsing about this farm, he might chance to run up against a charge of buckshot travelling in the opposite direction."

¹⁰³"But they won't let us leave," his daughter objected.

¹⁰⁴"Wait till Jefferson comes, and we'll soon manage that. ¹⁰⁵In the meantime, don't you fret yourself, my dearie, and don't get your eyes swelled up, else he'll be walking into me when he sees you. ¹⁰⁶There's nothing to be afear'd about, and there's no danger at all."

¹⁰⁷John Ferrier uttered these consoling remarks in a very confident tone, but she could not help observing that he paid unusual care to the fastening of the doors that night, and that he carefully cleaned and loaded the rusty old shotgun which hung upon the wall of his bedroom.

Chapter XI.

A Flight For Life

¹On the morning which followed his interview with the Mormon Prophet, John Ferrier went in to Salt Lake City, and having found his acquaintance, who was bound for the Nevada Mountains, he entrusted him with his message to Jefferson Hope. ²In it he told the young man of the imminent danger which threatened them, and how necessary it was that he should return. ³Having done thus he felt easier in his mind, and returned home with a lighter heart.

⁴As he approached his farm, he was surprised to see a horse hitched to each of the posts of the gate. ⁵Still more surprised was he on entering to find two young men in possession of his sitting-room. ⁶One, with a long pale face, was leaning back in the rocking-chair, with his feet cocked up upon the stove. ⁷The other, a bull-necked youth with coarse bloated features, was standing in front of the window with his hands in his pocket, whistling a popular hymn. ⁸Both of them nodded to Ferrier as he entered, and the one in the rocking-chair commenced the conversation.

⁹"Maybe you don't know us," he said. ¹⁰"This here is the son of Elder Drebber, and I'm Joseph Stangerson, who travelled with you in the desert when the Lord stretched out His hand and gathered you into the true fold."

¹¹"As He will all the nations in His own good time," said the other in a nasal voice; "He grindeth slowly but exceeding small."

¹²John Ferrier bowed coldly. ¹³He had guessed who his visitors were.

¹⁴"We have come," continued Stangerson, "at the advice of our fathers to solicit the hand of your daughter for whichever of us may seem good to you and to her. ¹⁵As I have but four wives and Brother Drebber here has seven, it appears to me that my claim is the stronger one."

¹⁶"Nay, nay, Brother Stangerson," cried the other; "the question is not how many wives we have, but how many we can keep. ¹⁷My father has now given over his mills to me, and I am the richer man."

¹⁸"But my prospects are better," said the other, warmly. ¹⁹"When the Lord removes my father, I shall have his tanning yard and his leather factory. ²⁰Then I am your elder, and am higher in the Church."

²¹"It will be for the maiden to decide," rejoined young Drebber, smirking at his own reflection in the glass. ²²"We will leave it all to her decision."

²³During this dialogue, John Ferrier had stood fuming in the doorway, hardly able to keep his riding-whip from the backs of his two visitors.

²⁴"Look here," he said at last, striding up to them, "when my daughter summons you, you can come, but until then I don't want to see your faces again."

²⁵The two young Mormons stared at him in amazement. ²⁶In their eyes this competition between them for the maiden's hand was the highest of honours both to her and her father.

²⁷"There are two ways out of the room," cried Ferrier; "there is the door, and there is the window. ²⁸Which do you care to use?"

²⁹His brown face looked so savage, and his gaunt hands so threatening, that his visitors sprang to their feet and beat a hurried retreat. ³⁰The old farmer followed them to the door.

³¹"Let me know when you have settled which it is to be," he said, sardonically.

³²“You shall smart for this!” Stangerson cried, white with rage. ³³“You have defied the Prophet and the Council of Four. ³⁴You shall rue it to the end of your days.”

³⁵“The hand of the Lord shall be heavy upon you,” cried young Drebber; ³⁶“He will arise and smite you!”

³⁷“Then I’ll start the smiting,” exclaimed Ferrier furiously, and would have rushed upstairs for his gun had not Lucy seized him by the arm and restrained him. ³⁸Before he could escape from her, the clatter of horses’ hoofs told him that they were beyond his reach.

³⁹“The young canting rascals!” he exclaimed, wiping the perspiration from his forehead; ⁴⁰“I would sooner see you in your grave, my girl, than the wife of either of them.”

⁴¹“And so should I, father,” she answered, with spirit; “but Jefferson will soon be here.”

⁴²“Yes. It will not be long before he comes. ⁴³The sooner the better, for we do not know what their next move may be.”

⁴⁴It was, indeed, high time that someone capable of giving advice and help should come to the aid of the sturdy old farmer and his adopted daughter. ⁴⁵In the whole history of the settlement there had never been such a case of rank disobedience to the authority of the Elders. ⁴⁶If minor errors were punished so sternly, what would be the fate of this arch rebel. ⁴⁷Ferrier knew that his wealth and position would be of no avail to him. ⁴⁸Others as well known and as rich as himself had been spirited away before now, and their goods given over to the Church. ⁴⁹He was a brave man, but he trembled at the vague, shadowy terrors which hung over him. ⁵⁰Any known danger he could face with a firm lip, but this suspense was unnerving. ⁵¹He concealed his fears from his daughter, however, and affected to make light of the whole matter, though she, with the keen eye of love, saw plainly that he was ill at ease.

⁵²He expected that he would receive some message or remonstrance from Young as to his conduct, and he was not mistaken, though it came in an unlooked-for manner. ⁵³Upon rising next morning he found, to his surprise, a small square of paper pinned on to the coverlet of his bed just over his chest. ⁵⁴On it was printed, in bold straggling letters:—

⁵⁵“Twenty-nine days are given you for amendment, and then—”

⁵⁶The dash was more fear-inspiring than any threat could have been. ⁵⁷How this warning came into his room puzzled John Ferrier sorely, for his servants slept in an outhouse, and the doors and windows had all been secured. ⁵⁸He crumpled the paper up and said nothing to his daughter, but the incident struck a chill into his heart. ⁵⁹The twenty-nine days were evidently the balance of the month which Young had promised. ⁶⁰What strength or courage could avail against an enemy armed with such mysterious powers? ⁶¹The hand which fastened that pin might have struck him to the heart, and he could never have known who had slain him.

⁶²Still more shaken was he next morning. ⁶³They had sat down to their breakfast when Lucy with a cry of surprise pointed upwards. ⁶⁴In the centre of the ceiling was scrawled, with a burned stick apparently, the number 28. ⁶⁵To his daughter it was unintelligible, and he did not enlighten her. ⁶⁶That night he sat up with his gun and kept watch and ward. ⁶⁷He saw and he heard nothing, and yet in the morning a great 27 had been painted upon the outside of his door.

⁶⁸Thus day followed day; and as sure as morning came he found that his unseen enemies had kept their register, and had marked up in some conspicuous position how many days were still left to him out of the month of grace. ⁶⁹Sometimes the fatal numbers appeared upon the walls, sometimes upon the floors, occasionally they were on small placards stuck upon the garden gate or the railings. ⁷⁰With all his vigilance John Ferrier could not discover whence these daily warnings proceeded. ⁷¹A horror which was almost superstitious came upon him at the sight of them. ⁷²He became haggard and restless, and his eyes

had the troubled look of some hunted creature. ⁷³He had but one hope in life now, and that was for the arrival of the young hunter from Nevada.

⁷⁴Twenty had changed to fifteen and fifteen to ten, but there was no news of the absentee. ⁷⁵One by one the numbers dwindled down, and still there came no sign of him. ⁷⁶Whenever a horseman clattered down the road, or a driver shouted at his team, the old farmer hurried to the gate thinking that help had arrived at last. ⁷⁷At last, when he saw five give way to four and that again to three, he lost heart, and abandoned all hope of escape. ⁷⁸Single-handed, and with his limited knowledge of the mountains which surrounded the settlement, he knew that he was powerless. ⁷⁹The more-frequented roads were strictly watched and guarded, and none could pass along them without an order from the Council. ⁸⁰Turn which way he would, there appeared to be no avoiding the blow which hung over him. ⁸¹Yet the old man never wavered in his resolution to part with life itself before he consented to what he regarded as his daughter's dishonour.

⁸²He was sitting alone one evening pondering deeply over his troubles, and searching vainly for some way out of them. ⁸³That morning had shown the figure 2 upon the wall of his house, and the next day would be the last of the allotted time. ⁸⁴What was to happen then? ⁸⁵All manner of vague and terrible fancies filled his imagination. ⁸⁶And his daughter—what was to become of her after he was gone? ⁸⁷Was there no escape from the invisible network which was drawn all round them. ⁸⁸He sank his head upon the table and sobbed at the thought of his own impotence.

⁸⁹What was that? ⁹⁰In the silence he heard a gentle scratching sound—low, but very distinct in the quiet of the night. ⁹¹It came from the door of the house. ⁹²Ferrier crept into the hall and listened intently. ⁹³There was a pause for a few moments, and then the low insidious sound was repeated. ⁹⁴Someone was evidently tapping very gently upon one of the panels of the door. ⁹⁵Was it some midnight assassin who had come to carry out the murderous orders of the secret tribunal? ⁹⁶Or was it some agent who was marking up that the last day of grace had arrived. ⁹⁷John Ferrier felt that instant death would be better than the suspense which shook his nerves and chilled his heart. ⁹⁸Springing forward he drew the bolt and threw the door open.

⁹⁹Outside all was calm and quiet. ¹⁰⁰The night was fine, and the stars were twinkling brightly overhead. ¹⁰¹The little front garden lay before the farmer's eyes bounded by the fence and gate, but neither there nor on the road was any human being to be seen. ¹⁰²With a sigh of relief, Ferrier looked to right and to left, until happening to glance straight down at his own feet he saw to his astonishment a man lying flat upon his face upon the ground, with arms and legs all asprawl.

¹⁰³So unnerved was he at the sight that he leaned up against the wall with his hand to his throat to stifle his inclination to call out. ¹⁰⁴His first thought was that the prostrate figure was that of some wounded or dying man, but as he watched it he saw it writhe along the ground and into the hall with the rapidity and noiselessness of a serpent. ¹⁰⁵Once within the house the man sprang to his feet, closed the door, and revealed to the astonished farmer the fierce face and resolute expression of Jefferson Hope.

¹⁰⁶“Good God!” gasped John Ferrier. ¹⁰⁷“How you scared me!” ¹⁰⁸“Whatever made you come in like that.”

¹⁰⁹“Give me food,” the other said, hoarsely. ¹¹⁰“I have had no time for bite or sup for eight-and-forty hours.” ¹¹¹He flung himself upon the cold meat and bread which were still lying upon the table from his host's supper, and devoured it voraciously. ¹¹²“Does Lucy bear up well?” he asked, when he had satisfied his hunger.

¹¹³“Yes. ¹¹⁴She does not know the danger,” her father answered.

¹¹⁵“That is well. ¹¹⁶The house is watched on every side. ¹¹⁷That is why I crawled my way up to it. ¹¹⁸They may be darned sharp, but they're not quite sharp enough to catch a Washoe hunter.”

¹¹⁹John Ferrier felt a different man now that he realized that he had a devoted ally. ¹²⁰He seized the young man's leathery hand and wrung it cordially. ¹²¹"You're a man to be proud of," he said. ¹²²"There are not many who would come to share our danger and our troubles."

¹²³"You've hit it there, pard," the young hunter answered. ¹²⁴"I have a respect for you, but if you were alone in this business I'd think twice before I put my head into such a hornet's nest. ¹²⁵It's Lucy that brings me here, and before harm comes on her I guess there will be one less o' the Hope family in Utah."

¹²⁶"What are we to do?"

¹²⁷"To-morrow is your last day, and unless you act to-night you are lost. ¹²⁸I have a mule and two horses waiting in the Eagle Ravine. ¹²⁹How much money have you?"

¹³⁰"Two thousand dollars in gold, and five in notes."

¹³¹"That will do. ¹³²I have as much more to add to it. ¹³³We must push for Carson City through the mountains. ¹³⁴You had best wake Lucy. ¹³⁵It is as well that the servants do not sleep in the house."

¹³⁶While Ferrier was absent, preparing his daughter for the approaching journey, Jefferson Hope packed all the eatables that he could find into a small parcel, and filled a stoneware jar with water, for he knew by experience that the mountain wells were few and far between. ¹³⁷He had hardly completed his arrangements before the farmer returned with his daughter all dressed and ready for a start. ¹³⁸The greeting between the lovers was warm, but brief, for minutes were precious, and there was much to be done.

¹³⁹"We must make our start at once," said Jefferson Hope, speaking in a low but resolute voice, like one who realizes the greatness of the peril, but has steeled his heart to meet it. ¹⁴⁰"The front and back entrances are watched, but with caution we may get away through the side window and across the fields. ¹⁴¹Once on the road we are only two miles from the Ravine where the horses are waiting. ¹⁴²By daybreak we should be half-way through the mountains."

¹⁴³"What if we are stopped," asked Ferrier.

¹⁴⁴Hope slapped the revolver butt which protruded from the front of his tunic. ¹⁴⁵"If they are too many for us we shall take two or three of them with us," he said with a sinister smile.

¹⁴⁶The lights inside the house had all been extinguished, and from the darkened window Ferrier peered over the fields which had been his own, and which he was now about to abandon for ever. ¹⁴⁷He had long nerved himself to the sacrifice, however, and the thought of the honour and happiness of his daughter outweighed any regret at his ruined fortunes. ¹⁴⁸All looked so peaceful and happy, the rustling trees and the broad silent stretch of grain-land, that it was difficult to realize that the spirit of murder lurked through it all. ¹⁴⁹Yet the white face and set expression of the young hunter showed that in his approach to the house he had seen enough to satisfy him upon that head.

¹⁵⁰Ferrier carried the bag of gold and notes, Jefferson Hope had the scanty provisions and water, while Lucy had a small bundle containing a few of her more valued possessions. ¹⁵¹Opening the window very slowly and carefully, they waited until a dark cloud had somewhat obscured the night, and then one by one passed through into the little garden. ¹⁵²With bated breath and crouching figures they stumbled across it, and gained the shelter of the hedge, which they skirted until they came to the gap which opened into the cornfields. ¹⁵³They had just reached this point when the young man seized his two companions and dragged them down into the shadow, where they lay silent and trembling.

¹⁵⁴It was as well that his prairie training had given Jefferson Hope the ears of a lynx. ¹⁵⁵He and his friends had hardly crouched down before the melancholy hooting of a mountain owl was heard within a few yards of them, which was immediately answered by another hoot at a small distance. ¹⁵⁶At the

same moment a vague shadowy figure emerged from the gap for which they had been making, and uttered the plaintive signal cry again, on which a second man appeared out of the obscurity.

¹⁵⁷“To-morrow at midnight,” said the first who appeared to be in authority. ¹⁵⁸“When the Whip-poor-Will calls three times.”

¹⁵⁹“It is well,” returned the other. ¹⁶⁰“Shall I tell Brother Drebber?”

¹⁶¹“Pass it on to him, and from him to the others. ¹⁶²Nine to seven!”

¹⁶³“Seven to five!” repeated the other, and the two figures flitted away in different directions. ¹⁶⁴Their concluding words had evidently been some form of sign and countersign. ¹⁶⁵The instant that their footsteps had died away in the distance, Jefferson Hope sprang to his feet, and helping his companions through the gap, led the way across the fields at the top of his speed, supporting and half-carrying the girl when her strength appeared to fail her.

¹⁶⁶“Hurry on! hurry on!” he gasped from time to time. ¹⁶⁷“We are through the line of sentinels. ¹⁶⁸Everything depends on speed. ¹⁶⁹Hurry on!”

¹⁷⁰Once on the high road they made rapid progress. ¹⁷¹Only once did they meet anyone, and then they managed to slip into a field, and so avoid recognition. ¹⁷²Before reaching the town the hunter branched away into a rugged and narrow footpath which led to the mountains. ¹⁷³Two dark jagged peaks loomed above them through the darkness, and the defile which led between them was the Eagle Cañon in which the horses were awaiting them. ¹⁷⁴With unerring instinct Jefferson Hope picked his way among the great boulders and along the bed of a dried-up watercourse, until he came to the retired corner, screened with rocks, where the faithful animals had been picketed. ¹⁷⁵The girl was placed upon the mule, and old Ferrier upon one of the horses, with his money-bag, while Jefferson Hope led the other along the precipitous and dangerous path.

¹⁷⁶It was a bewildering route for anyone who was not accustomed to face Nature in her wildest moods. ¹⁷⁷On the one side a great crag towered up a thousand feet or more, black, stern, and menacing, with long basaltic columns upon its rugged surface like the ribs of some petrified monster. ¹⁷⁸On the other hand a wild chaos of boulders and debris made all advance impossible. ¹⁷⁹Between the two ran the irregular track, so narrow in places that they had to travel in Indian file, and so rough that only practised riders could have traversed it at all. ¹⁸⁰Yet in spite of all dangers and difficulties, the hearts of the fugitives were light within them, for every step increased the distance between them and the terrible despotism from which they were flying.

¹⁸¹They soon had a proof, however, that they were still within the jurisdiction of the Saints. ¹⁸²They had reached the very wildest and most desolate portion of the pass when the girl gave a startled cry, and pointed upwards. ¹⁸³On a rock which overlooked the track, showing out dark and plain against the sky, there stood a solitary sentinel. ¹⁸⁴He saw them as soon as they perceived him, and his military challenge of “Who goes there?” rang through the silent ravine.

¹⁸⁵“Travellers for Nevada,” said Jefferson Hope, with his hand upon the rifle which hung by his saddle.

¹⁸⁶They could see the lonely watcher fingering his gun, and peering down at them as if dissatisfied at their reply.

¹⁸⁷“By whose permission?” he asked.

¹⁸⁸“The Holy Four,” answered Ferrier. ¹⁸⁹His Mormon experiences had taught him that that was the highest authority to which he could refer.

¹⁹⁰“Nine from seven,” cried the sentinel.

¹⁹¹“Seven from five,” returned Jefferson Hope promptly, remembering the countersign which he had heard in the garden.

¹⁹²“Pass, and the Lord go with you,” said the voice from above. ¹⁹³Beyond his post the path broadened out, and the horses were able to break into a trot. ¹⁹⁴Looking back, they could see the solitary watcher leaning upon his gun, and knew that they had passed the outlying post of the chosen people, and that freedom lay before them.

Chapter XII.

The Avenging Angels

¹All night their course lay through intricate defiles and over irregular and rock-strewn paths. ²More than once they lost their way, but Hope's intimate knowledge of the mountains enabled them to regain the track once more. ³When morning broke, a scene of marvellous though savage beauty lay before them. ⁴In every direction the great snow-capped peaks hemmed them in, peeping over each other's shoulders to the far horizon. ⁵So steep were the rocky banks on either side of them, that the larch and the pine seemed to be suspended over their heads, and to need only a gust of wind to come hurtling down upon them. ⁶Nor was the fear entirely an illusion, for the barren valley was thickly strewn with trees and boulders which had fallen in a similar manner. ⁷Even as they passed, a great rock came thundering down with a hoarse rattle which woke the echoes in the silent gorges, and startled the weary horses into a gallop.

⁸As the sun rose slowly above the eastern horizon, the caps of the great mountains lit up one after the other, like lamps at a festival, until they were all ruddy and glowing. ⁹The magnificent spectacle cheered the hearts of the three fugitives and gave them fresh energy. ¹⁰At a wild torrent which swept out of a ravine they called a halt and watered their horses, while they partook of a hasty breakfast. ¹¹Lucy and her father would fain have rested longer, but Jefferson Hope was inexorable. ¹²"They will be upon our track by this time," he said. ¹³"Everything depends upon our speed. ¹⁴Once safe in Carson we may rest for the remainder of our lives."

¹⁵During the whole of that day they struggled on through the defiles, and by evening they calculated that they were more than thirty miles from their enemies. ¹⁶At night-time they chose the base of a beetling crag, where the rocks offered some protection from the chill wind, and there huddled together for warmth, they enjoyed a few hours' sleep. ¹⁷Before daybreak, however, they were up and on their way once more. ¹⁸They had seen no signs of any pursuers, and Jefferson Hope began to think that they were fairly out of the reach of the terrible organization whose enmity they had incurred. ¹⁹He little knew how far that iron grasp could reach, or how soon it was to close upon them and crush them.

²⁰About the middle of the second day of their flight their scanty store of provisions began to run out. ²¹This gave the hunter little uneasiness, however, for there was game to be had among the mountains, and he had frequently before had to depend upon his rifle for the needs of life. ²²Choosing a sheltered nook, he piled together a few dried branches and made a blazing fire, at which his companions might warm themselves, for they were now nearly five thousand feet above the sea level, and the air was bitter and keen. ²³Having tethered the horses, and bade Lucy adieu, he threw his gun over his shoulder, and set out in search of whatever chance might throw in his way. ²⁴Looking back he saw the old man and the young girl crouching over the blazing fire, while the three animals stood motionless in the background. ²⁵Then the intervening rocks hid them from his view.

²⁶He walked for a couple of miles through one ravine after another without success, though from the marks upon the bark of the trees, and other indications, he judged that there were numerous bears in the vicinity. ²⁷At last, after two or three hours' fruitless search, he was thinking of turning back in despair, when casting his eyes upwards he saw a sight which sent a thrill of pleasure through his heart. ²⁸On the edge of a jutting pinnacle, three or four hundred feet above him, there stood a creature somewhat resembling a sheep in appearance, but armed with a pair of gigantic horns. ²⁹The big-horn—for so it is called—was acting, probably, as a guardian over a flock which were invisible to the hunter; but fortunately it was heading in the opposite direction, and had not perceived him. ³⁰Lying on his face, he rested his rifle upon a rock, and took a long and steady aim before drawing the trigger. ³¹The animal

sprang into the air, tottered for a moment upon the edge of the precipice, and then came crashing down into the valley beneath.

³²The creature was too unwieldy to lift, so the hunter contented himself with cutting away one haunch and part of the flank. ³³With this trophy over his shoulder, he hastened to retrace his steps, for the evening was already drawing in. ³⁴He had hardly started, however, before he realized the difficulty which faced him. ³⁵In his eagerness he had wandered far past the ravines which were known to him, and it was no easy matter to pick out the path which he had taken. ³⁶The valley in which he found himself divided and sub-divided into many gorges, which were so like each other that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. ³⁷He followed one for a mile or more until he came to a mountain torrent which he was sure that he had never seen before. ³⁸Convinced that he had taken the wrong turn, he tried another, but with the same result. ³⁹Night was coming on rapidly, and it was almost dark before he at last found himself in a defile which was familiar to him. ⁴⁰Even then it was no easy matter to keep to the right track, for the moon had not yet risen, and the high cliffs on either side made the obscurity more profound. ⁴¹Weighed down with his burden, and weary from his exertions, he stumbled along, keeping up his heart by the reflection that every step brought him nearer to Lucy, and that he carried with him enough to ensure them food for the remainder of their journey.

⁴²He had now come to the mouth of the very defile in which he had left them. ⁴³Even in the darkness he could recognize the outline of the cliffs which bounded it. ⁴⁴They must, he reflected, be awaiting him anxiously, for he had been absent nearly five hours. ⁴⁵In the gladness of his heart he put his hands to his mouth and made the glen re-echo to a loud halloo as a signal that he was coming. ⁴⁶He paused and listened for an answer. ⁴⁷None came save his own cry, which clattered up the dreary silent ravines, and was borne back to his ears in countless repetitions. ⁴⁸Again he shouted, even louder than before, and again no whisper came back from the friends whom he had left such a short time ago. ⁴⁹A vague, nameless dread came over him, and he hurried onwards frantically, dropping the precious food in his agitation.

⁵⁰When he turned the corner, he came full in sight of the spot where the fire had been lit. ⁵¹There was still a glowing pile of wood ashes there, but it had evidently not been tended since his departure. ⁵²The same dead silence still reigned all round. ⁵³With his fears all changed to convictions, he hurried on. ⁵⁴There was no living creature near the remains of the fire: animals, man, maiden, all were gone. ⁵⁵It was only too clear that some sudden and terrible disaster had occurred during his absence—a disaster which had embraced them all, and yet had left no traces behind it.

⁵⁶Bewildered and stunned by this blow, Jefferson Hope felt his head spin round, and had to lean upon his rifle to save himself from falling. ⁵⁷He was essentially a man of action, however, and speedily recovered from his temporary impotence. ⁵⁸Seizing a half-consumed piece of wood from the smouldering fire, he blew it into a flame, and proceeded with its help to examine the little camp. ⁵⁹The ground was all stamped down by the feet of horses, showing that a large party of mounted men had overtaken the fugitives, and the direction of their tracks proved that they had afterwards turned back to Salt Lake City. ⁶⁰Had they carried back both of his companions with them? ⁶¹Jefferson Hope had almost persuaded himself that they must have done so, when his eye fell upon an object which made every nerve of his body tingle within him. ⁶²A little way on one side of the camp was a low-lying heap of reddish soil, which had assuredly not been there before. ⁶³There was no mistaking it for anything but a newly-dug grave. ⁶⁴As the young hunter approached it, he perceived that a stick had been planted on it, with a sheet of paper stuck in the cleft fork of it. ⁶⁵The inscription upon the paper was brief, but to the point:

⁶⁶JOHN FERRIER,

⁶⁷Formerly of Salt Lake City,

⁶⁸Died August 4th, 1860.

⁶⁹The sturdy old man, whom he had left so short a time before, was gone, then, and this was all his epitaph. ⁷⁰Jefferson Hope looked wildly round to see if there was a second grave, but there was no sign of one. ⁷¹Lucy had been carried back by their terrible pursuers to fulfil her original destiny, by becoming one of the harem of the Elder's son. ⁷²As the young fellow realized the certainty of her fate, and his own powerlessness to prevent it, he wished that he, too, was lying with the old farmer in his last silent resting-place.

⁷³Again, however, his active spirit shook off the lethargy which springs from despair. ⁷⁴If there was nothing else left to him, he could at least devote his life to revenge. ⁷⁵With indomitable patience and perseverance, Jefferson Hope possessed also a power of sustained vindictiveness, which he may have learned from the Indians amongst whom he had lived. ⁷⁶As he stood by the desolate fire, he felt that the only one thing which could assuage his grief would be thorough and complete retribution, brought by his own hand upon his enemies. ⁷⁷His strong will and untiring energy should, he determined, be devoted to that one end. ⁷⁸With a grim, white face, he retraced his steps to where he had dropped the food, and having stirred up the smouldering fire, he cooked enough to last him for a few days. ⁷⁹This he made up into a bundle, and, tired as he was, he set himself to walk back through the mountains upon the track of the avenging angels.

⁸⁰For five days he toiled footsore and weary through the defiles which he had already traversed on horseback. ⁸¹At night he flung himself down among the rocks, and snatched a few hours of sleep; but before daybreak he was always well on his way. ⁸²On the sixth day, he reached the Eagle Cañon, from which they had commenced their ill-fated flight. ⁸³Thence he could look down upon the home of the saints. ⁸⁴Worn and exhausted, he leaned upon his rifle and shook his gaunt hand fiercely at the silent widespread city beneath him. ⁸⁵As he looked at it, he observed that there were flags in some of the principal streets, and other signs of festivity. ⁸⁶He was still speculating as to what this might mean when he heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and saw a mounted man riding towards him. ⁸⁷As he approached, he recognized him as a Mormon named Cowper, to whom he had rendered services at different times. ⁸⁸He therefore accosted him when he got up to him, with the object of finding out what Lucy Ferrier's fate had been.

⁸⁹"I am Jefferson Hope," he said. ⁹⁰"You remember me."

⁹¹The Mormon looked at him with undisguised astonishment—indeed, it was difficult to recognize in this tattered, unkempt wanderer, with ghastly white face and fierce, wild eyes, the spruce young hunter of former days. ⁹²Having, however, at last, satisfied himself as to his identity, the man's surprise changed to consternation.

⁹³"You are mad to come here," he cried. ⁹⁴"It is as much as my own life is worth to be seen talking with you. ⁹⁵There is a warrant against you from the Holy Four for assisting the Ferriers away."

⁹⁶"I don't fear them, or their warrant," Hope said, earnestly. ⁹⁷"You must know something of this matter, Cowper. ⁹⁸I conjure you by everything you hold dear to answer a few questions. ⁹⁹We have always been friends. ¹⁰⁰For God's sake, don't refuse to answer me."

¹⁰¹"What is it?" the Mormon asked uneasily. ¹⁰²"Be quick. ¹⁰³The very rocks have ears and the trees eyes."

¹⁰⁴"What has become of Lucy Ferrier?"

¹⁰⁵"She was married yesterday to young Drebber. ¹⁰⁶Hold up, man, hold up, you have no life left in you."

¹⁰⁷"Don't mind me," said Hope faintly. ¹⁰⁸He was white to the very lips, and had sunk down on the stone against which he had been leaning. ¹⁰⁹"Married, you say?"

¹¹⁰“Married yesterday—that's what those flags are for on the Endowment House. ¹¹¹There was some words between young Drebber and young Stangerson as to which was to have her. ¹¹²They'd both been in the party that followed them, and Stangerson had shot her father, which seemed to give him the best claim; but when they argued it out in council, Drebber's party was the stronger, so the Prophet gave her over to him. ¹¹³No one won't have her very long though, for I saw death in her face yesterday. ¹¹⁴She is more like a ghost than a woman. ¹¹⁵Are you off, then?”

¹¹⁶“Yes, I am off,” said Jefferson Hope, who had risen from his seat. ¹¹⁷His face might have been chiselled out of marble, so hard and set was its expression, while its eyes glowed with a baleful light.

¹¹⁸“Where are you going?”

¹¹⁹“Never mind,” he answered; and, slinging his weapon over his shoulder, strode off down the gorge and so away into the heart of the mountains to the haunts of the wild beasts. ¹²⁰Amongst them all there was none so fierce and so dangerous as himself.

¹²¹The prediction of the Mormon was only too well fulfilled. ¹²²Whether it was the terrible death of her father or the effects of the hateful marriage into which she had been forced, poor Lucy never held up her head again, but pined away and died within a month. ¹²³Her sottish husband, who had married her principally for the sake of John Ferrier's property, did not affect any great grief at his bereavement; but his other wives mourned over her, and sat up with her the night before the burial, as is the Mormon custom. ¹²⁴They were grouped round the bier in the early hours of the morning, when, to their inexpressible fear and astonishment, the door was flung open, and a savage-looking, weather-beaten man in tattered garments strode into the room. ¹²⁵Without a glance or a word to the cowering women, he walked up to the white silent figure which had once contained the pure soul of Lucy Ferrier. ¹²⁶Stooping over her, he pressed his lips reverently to her cold forehead, and then, snatching up her hand, he took the wedding-ring from her finger. ¹²⁷“She shall not be buried in that,” he cried with a fierce snarl, and before an alarm could be raised sprang down the stairs and was gone. ¹²⁸So strange and so brief was the episode, that the watchers might have found it hard to believe it themselves or persuade other people of it, had it not been for the undeniable fact that the circlet of gold which marked her as having been a bride had disappeared.

¹²⁹For some months Jefferson Hope lingered among the mountains, leading a strange wild life, and nursing in his heart the fierce desire for vengeance which possessed him. ¹³⁰Tales were told in the City of the weird figure which was seen prowling about the suburbs, and which haunted the lonely mountain gorges. ¹³¹Once a bullet whistled through Stangerson's window and flattened itself upon the wall within a foot of him. ¹³²On another occasion, as Drebber passed under a cliff a great boulder crashed down on him, and he only escaped a terrible death by throwing himself upon his face. ¹³³The two young Mormons were not long in discovering the reason of these attempts upon their lives, and led repeated expeditions into the mountains in the hope of capturing or killing their enemy, but always without success. ¹³⁴Then they adopted the precaution of never going out alone or after nightfall, and of having their houses guarded. ¹³⁵After a time they were able to relax these measures, for nothing was either heard or seen of their opponent, and they hoped that time had cooled his vindictiveness.

¹³⁶Far from doing so, it had, if anything, augmented it. ¹³⁷The hunter's mind was of a hard, unyielding nature, and the predominant idea of revenge had taken such complete possession of it that there was no room for any other emotion. ¹³⁸He was, however, above all things practical. ¹³⁹He soon realized that even his iron constitution could not stand the incessant strain which he was putting upon it. ¹⁴⁰Exposure and want of wholesome food were wearing him out. ¹⁴¹If he died like a dog among the mountains, what was to become of his revenge then? ¹⁴²And yet such a death was sure to overtake him if he persisted. ¹⁴³He felt that that was to play his enemy's game, so he reluctantly returned to the old Nevada mines, there to recruit his health and to amass money enough to allow him to pursue his object without privation.

¹⁴⁴His intention had been to be absent a year at the most, but a combination of unforeseen circumstances prevented his leaving the mines for nearly five. ¹⁴⁵At the end of that time, however, his memory of his wrongs and his craving for revenge were quite as keen as on that memorable night when he had stood by John Ferrier's grave. ¹⁴⁶Disguised, and under an assumed name, he returned to Salt Lake City, careless what became of his own life, as long as he obtained what he knew to be justice. ¹⁴⁷There he found evil tidings awaiting him. ¹⁴⁸There had been a schism among the Chosen People a few months before, some of the younger members of the Church having rebelled against the authority of the Elders, and the result had been the secession of a certain number of the malcontents, who had left Utah and become Gentiles. ¹⁴⁹Among these had been Drebber and Stangerson; and no one knew whither they had gone. ¹⁵⁰Rumour reported that Drebber had managed to convert a large part of his property into money, and that he had departed a wealthy man, while his companion, Stangerson, was comparatively poor. ¹⁵¹There was no clue at all, however, as to their whereabouts.

¹⁵²Many a man, however vindictive, would have abandoned all thought of revenge in the face of such a difficulty, but Jefferson Hope never faltered for a moment. ¹⁵³With the small competence he possessed, eked out by such employment as he could pick up, he travelled from town to town through the United States in quest of his enemies. ¹⁵⁴Year passed into year, his black hair turned grizzled, but still he wandered on, a human bloodhound, with his mind wholly set upon the one object upon which he had devoted his life. ¹⁵⁵At last his perseverance was rewarded. ¹⁵⁶It was but a glance of a face in a window, but that one glance told him that Cleveland in Ohio possessed the men whom he was in pursuit of. ¹⁵⁷He returned to his miserable lodgings with his plan of vengeance all arranged. ¹⁵⁸It chanced, however, that Drebber, looking from his window, had recognized the vagrant in the street, and had read murder in his eyes. ¹⁵⁹He hurried before a justice of the peace, accompanied by Stangerson, who had become his private secretary, and represented to him that they were in danger of their lives from the jealousy and hatred of an old rival. ¹⁶⁰That evening Jefferson Hope was taken into custody, and not being able to find sureties, was detained for some weeks. ¹⁶¹When at last he was liberated, it was only to find that Drebber's house was deserted, and that he and his secretary had departed for Europe.

¹⁶²Again the avenger had been foiled, and again his concentrated hatred urged him to continue the pursuit. ¹⁶³Funds were wanting, however, and for some time he had to return to work, saving every dollar for his approaching journey. ¹⁶⁴At last, having collected enough to keep life in him, he departed for Europe, and tracked his enemies from city to city, working his way in any menial capacity, but never overtaking the fugitives. ¹⁶⁵When he reached St. Petersburg they had departed for Paris; and when he followed them there he learned that they had just set off for Copenhagen. ¹⁶⁶At the Danish capital he was again a few days late, for they had journeyed on to London, where he at last succeeded in running them to earth. ¹⁶⁷As to what occurred there, we cannot do better than quote the old hunter's own account, as duly recorded in Dr. Watson's Journal, to which we are already under such obligations.

Chapter XIII.

A Continuation Of The Reminiscences Of John Watson, M.D.

¹Our prisoner's furious resistance did not apparently indicate any ferocity in his disposition towards ourselves, for on finding himself powerless, he smiled in an affable manner, and expressed his hopes that he had not hurt any of us in the scuffle. ²"I guess you're going to take me to the police-station," he remarked to Sherlock Holmes. ³"My cab's at the door. ⁴If you'll loose my legs I'll walk down to it. ⁵I'm not so light to lift as I used to be."

⁶Gregson and Lestrade exchanged glances as if they thought this proposition rather a bold one; but Holmes at once took the prisoner at his word, and loosened the towel which we had bound round his ankles. ⁷He rose and stretched his legs, as though to assure himself that they were free once more. ⁸I remember that I thought to myself, as I eyed him, that I had seldom seen a more powerfully built man; and his dark sunburned face bore an expression of determination and energy which was as formidable as his personal strength.

⁹"If there's a vacant place for a chief of the police, I reckon you are the man for it," he said, gazing with undisguised admiration at my fellow-lodger. ¹⁰"The way you kept on my trail was a caution."

¹¹"You had better come with me," said Holmes to the two detectives.

¹²"I can drive you," said Lestrade.

¹³"Good! and Gregson can come inside with me. ¹⁴You too, Doctor, you have taken an interest in the case and may as well stick to us."

¹⁵I assented gladly, and we all descended together. ¹⁶Our prisoner made no attempt at escape, but stepped calmly into the cab which had been his, and we followed him. ¹⁷Lestrade mounted the box, whipped up the horse, and brought us in a very short time to our destination. ¹⁸We were ushered into a small chamber where a police Inspector noted down our prisoner's name and the names of the men with whose murder he had been charged. ¹⁹The official was a white-faced unemotional man, who went through his duties in a dull mechanical way. ²⁰"The prisoner will be put before the magistrates in the course of the week," he said; "in the mean time, Mr. Jefferson Hope, have you anything that you wish to say? ²¹I must warn you that your words will be taken down, and may be used against you."

²²"I've got a good deal to say," our prisoner said slowly. ²³"I want to tell you gentlemen all about it."

²⁴"Hadn't you better reserve that for your trial?" asked the Inspector.

²⁵"I may never be tried," he answered. ²⁶"You needn't look startled. ²⁷It isn't suicide I am thinking of.

²⁸Are you a Doctor?" ²⁹He turned his fierce dark eyes upon me as he asked this last question.

³⁰"Yes; I am," I answered.

³¹"Then put your hand here," he said, with a smile, motioning with his manacled wrists towards his chest.

³²I did so; and became at once conscious of an extraordinary throbbing and commotion which was going on inside. ³³The walls of his chest seemed to thrill and quiver as a frail building would do inside when some powerful engine was at work. ³⁴In the silence of the room I could hear a dull humming and buzzing noise which proceeded from the same source.

³⁵"Why," I cried, "you have an aortic aneurism!"

³⁶“That's what they call it,” he said, placidly. ³⁷“I went to a Doctor last week about it, and he told me that it is bound to burst before many days passed. ³⁸It has been getting worse for years. ³⁹I got it from over-exposure and under-feeding among the Salt Lake Mountains. ⁴⁰I've done my work now, and I don't care how soon I go, but I should like to leave some account of the business behind me. ⁴¹I don't want to be remembered as a common cut-throat.”

⁴²The Inspector and the two detectives had a hurried discussion as to the advisability of allowing him to tell his story.

⁴³“Do you consider, Doctor, that there is immediate danger?” the former asked.

⁴⁴“Most certainly there is,” I answered.

⁴⁵“In that case it is clearly our duty, in the interests of justice, to take his statement,” said the Inspector.

⁴⁶“You are at liberty, sir, to give your account, which I again warn you will be taken down.”

⁴⁷“I'll sit down, with your leave,” the prisoner said, suiting the action to the word. ⁴⁸“This aneurism of mine makes me easily tired, and the tussle we had half an hour ago has not mended matters. ⁴⁹I'm on the brink of the grave, and I am not likely to lie to you. ⁵⁰Every word I say is the absolute truth, and how you use it is a matter of no consequence to me.”

⁵¹With these words, Jefferson Hope leaned back in his chair and began the following remarkable statement. ⁵²He spoke in a calm and methodical manner, as though the events which he narrated were commonplace enough. ⁵³I can vouch for the accuracy of the subjoined account, for I have had access to Lestrade's note-book, in which the prisoner's words were taken down exactly as they were uttered.

⁵⁴“It don't much matter to you why I hated these men,” he said; “it's enough that they were guilty of the death of two human beings—a father and a daughter—and that they had, therefore, forfeited their own lives. ⁵⁵After the lapse of time that has passed since their crime, it was impossible for me to secure a conviction against them in any court. ⁵⁶I knew of their guilt though, and I determined that I should be judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. ⁵⁷You'd have done the same, if you have any manhood in you, if you had been in my place.

⁵⁸“That girl that I spoke of was to have married me twenty years ago. ⁵⁹She was forced into marrying that same Drebber, and broke her heart over it. ⁶⁰I took the marriage ring from her dead finger, and I vowed that his dying eyes should rest upon that very ring, and that his last thoughts should be of the crime for which he was punished. ⁶¹I have carried it about with me, and have followed him and his accomplice over two continents until I caught them. ⁶²They thought to tire me out, but they could not do it. ⁶³If I die to-morrow, as is likely enough, I die knowing that my work in this world is done, and well done. ⁶⁴They have perished, and by my hand. ⁶⁵There is nothing left for me to hope for, or to desire.

⁶⁶“They were rich and I was poor, so that it was no easy matter for me to follow them. ⁶⁷When I got to London my pocket was about empty, and I found that I must turn my hand to something for my living. ⁶⁸Driving and riding are as natural to me as walking, so I applied at a cabowner's office, and soon got employment. ⁶⁹I was to bring a certain sum a week to the owner, and whatever was over that I might keep for myself. ⁷⁰There was seldom much over, but I managed to scrape along somehow. ⁷¹The hardest job was to learn my way about, for I reckon that of all the mazes that ever were contrived, this city is the most confusing. ⁷²I had a map beside me though, and when once I had spotted the principal hotels and stations, I got on pretty well.

⁷³“It was some time before I found out where my two gentlemen were living; but I inquired and inquired until at last I dropped across them. ⁷⁴They were at a boarding-house at Camberwell, over on the other side of the river. ⁷⁵When once I found them out I knew that I had them at my mercy. ⁷⁶I had grown my beard, and there was no chance of their recognizing me. ⁷⁷I would dog them and follow them until I saw my opportunity. ⁷⁸I was determined that they should not escape me again.

⁷⁹“They were very near doing it for all that. ⁸⁰Go where they would about London, I was always at their heels. ⁸¹Sometimes I followed them on my cab, and sometimes on foot, but the former was the best, for then they could not get away from me. ⁸²It was only early in the morning or late at night that I could earn anything, so that I began to get behind hand with my employer. ⁸³I did not mind that, however, as long as I could lay my hand upon the men I wanted.

⁸⁴“They were very cunning, though. ⁸⁵They must have thought that there was some chance of their being followed, for they would never go out alone, and never after nightfall. ⁸⁶During two weeks I drove behind them every day, and never once saw them separate. ⁸⁷Drebber himself was drunk half the time, but Stangerson was not to be caught napping. ⁸⁸I watched them late and early, but never saw the ghost of a chance; but I was not discouraged, for something told me that the hour had almost come. ⁸⁹My only fear was that this thing in my chest might burst a little too soon and leave my work undone.

⁹⁰“At last, one evening I was driving up and down Torquay Terrace, as the street was called in which they boarded, when I saw a cab drive up to their door. ⁹¹Presently some luggage was brought out, and after a time Drebber and Stangerson followed it, and drove off. ⁹²I whipped up my horse and kept within sight of them, feeling very ill at ease, for I feared that they were going to shift their quarters. ⁹³At Euston Station they got out, and I left a boy to hold my horse, and followed them on to the platform. ⁹⁴I heard them ask for the Liverpool train, and the guard answer that one had just gone and there would not be another for some hours. ⁹⁵Stangerson seemed to be put out at that, but Drebber was rather pleased than otherwise. ⁹⁶I got so close to them in the bustle that I could hear every word that passed between them. ⁹⁷Drebber said that he had a little business of his own to do, and that if the other would wait for him he would soon rejoin him. ⁹⁸His companion remonstrated with him, and reminded him that they had resolved to stick together. ⁹⁹Drebber answered that the matter was a delicate one, and that he must go alone. ¹⁰⁰I could not catch what Stangerson said to that, but the other burst out swearing, and reminded him that he was nothing more than his paid servant, and that he must not presume to dictate to him. ¹⁰¹On that the Secretary gave it up as a bad job, and simply bargained with him that if he missed the last train he should rejoin him at Halliday's Private Hotel; to which Drebber answered that he would be back on the platform before eleven, and made his way out of the station.

¹⁰²“The moment for which I had waited so long had at last come. ¹⁰³I had my enemies within my power. ¹⁰⁴Together they could protect each other, but singly they were at my mercy. ¹⁰⁵I did not act, however, with undue precipitation. ¹⁰⁶My plans were already formed. ¹⁰⁷There is no satisfaction in vengeance unless the offender has time to realize who it is that strikes him, and why retribution has come upon him. I had my plans arranged by which I should have the opportunity of making the man who had wronged me understand that his old sin had found him out. ¹⁰⁸It chanced that some days before a gentleman who had been engaged in looking over some houses in the Brixton Road had dropped the key of one of them in my carriage. ¹⁰⁹It was claimed that same evening, and returned; but in the interval I had taken a moulding of it, and had a duplicate constructed. ¹¹⁰By means of this I had access to at least one spot in this great city where I could rely upon being free from interruption. ¹¹¹How to get Drebber to that house was the difficult problem which I had now to solve.

¹¹²“He walked down the road and went into one or two liquor shops, staying for nearly half-an-hour in the last of them. ¹¹³When he came out he staggered in his walk, and was evidently pretty well on. ¹¹⁴There was a hansom just in front of me, and he hailed it. ¹¹⁵I followed it so close that the nose of my horse was within a yard of his driver the whole way. ¹¹⁶We rattled across Waterloo Bridge and through miles of streets, until, to my astonishment, we found ourselves back in the Terrace in which he had boarded. ¹¹⁷I could not imagine what his intention was in returning there; but I went on and pulled up my cab a hundred yards or so from the house. ¹¹⁸He entered it, and his hansom drove away. ¹¹⁹Give me a glass of water, if you please. ¹²⁰My mouth gets dry with the talking.”

¹²¹I handed him the glass, and he drank it down.

¹²²“That's better,” he said. ¹²³“Well, I waited for a quarter of an hour, or more, when suddenly there came a noise like people struggling inside the house. ¹²⁴Next moment the door was flung open and two men appeared, one of whom was Drebber, and the other was a young chap whom I had never seen before. ¹²⁵This fellow had Drebber by the collar, and when they came to the head of the steps he gave him a shove and a kick which sent him half across the road. ¹²⁶“You hound,” he cried, shaking his stick at him; ‘I’ll teach you to insult an honest girl!’ ¹²⁷He was so hot that I think he would have thrashed Drebber with his cudgel, only that the cur staggered away down the road as fast as his legs would carry him. ¹²⁸He ran as far as the corner, and then, seeing my cab, he hailed me and jumped in. ¹²⁹“Drive me to Halliday's Private Hotel,” said he.

¹³⁰“When I had him fairly inside my cab, my heart jumped so with joy that I feared lest at this last moment my aneurism might go wrong. ¹³¹I drove along slowly, weighing in my own mind what it was best to do. ¹³²I might take him right out into the country, and there in some deserted lane have my last interview with him. ¹³³I had almost decided upon this, when he solved the problem for me. ¹³⁴The craze for drink had seized him again, and he ordered me to pull up outside a gin palace. ¹³⁵He went in, leaving word that I should wait for him. ¹³⁶There he remained until closing time, and when he came out he was so far gone that I knew the game was in my own hands.

¹³⁷“Don't imagine that I intended to kill him in cold blood. ¹³⁸It would only have been rigid justice if I had done so, but I could not bring myself to do it. ¹³⁹I had long determined that he should have a show for his life if he chose to take advantage of it. ¹⁴⁰Among the many billets which I have filled in America during my wandering life, I was once janitor and sweeper out of the laboratory at York College. ¹⁴¹One day the professor was lecturing on poisons, and he showed his students some alkaloid, as he called it, which he had extracted from some South American arrow poison, and which was so powerful that the least grain meant instant death. ¹⁴²I spotted the bottle in which this preparation was kept, and when they were all gone, I helped myself to a little of it. ¹⁴³I was a fairly good dispenser, so I worked this alkaloid into small, soluble pills, and each pill I put in a box with a similar pill made without the poison. ¹⁴⁴I determined at the time that when I had my chance, my gentlemen should each have a draw out of one of these boxes, while I ate the pill that remained. ¹⁴⁵It would be quite as deadly, and a good deal less noisy than firing across a handkerchief. ¹⁴⁶From that day I had always my pill boxes about with me, and the time had now come when I was to use them.

¹⁴⁷“It was nearer one than twelve, and a wild, bleak night, blowing hard and raining in torrents. ¹⁴⁸Dismal as it was outside, I was glad within—so glad that I could have shouted out from pure exultation. ¹⁴⁹If any of you gentlemen have ever pined for a thing, and longed for it during twenty long years, and then suddenly found it within your reach, you would understand my feelings. ¹⁵⁰I lit a cigar, and puffed at it to steady my nerves, but my hands were trembling, and my temples throbbing with excitement. ¹⁵¹As I drove, I could see old John Ferrier and sweet Lucy looking at me out of the darkness and smiling at me, just as plain as I see you all in this room. ¹⁵²All the way they were ahead of me, one on each side of the horse until I pulled up at the house in the Brixton Road.

¹⁵³“There was not a soul to be seen, nor a sound to be heard, except the dripping of the rain. ¹⁵⁴When I looked in at the window, I found Drebber all huddled together in a drunken sleep. ¹⁵⁵I shook him by the arm, ‘It's time to get out,’ I said.

¹⁵⁶“All right, cabby,” said he.

¹⁵⁷“I suppose he thought we had come to the hotel that he had mentioned, for he got out without another word, and followed me down the garden. ¹⁵⁸I had to walk beside him to keep him steady, for he was still a little top-heavy. ¹⁵⁹When we came to the door, I opened it, and led him into the front room. ¹⁶⁰I give you my word that all the way, the father and the daughter were walking in front of us.

¹⁶¹“It's infernally dark,” said he, stamping about.

¹⁶²“We'll soon have a light,” I said, striking a match and putting it to a wax candle which I had brought with me. ¹⁶³“Now, Enoch Drebbler,” I continued, turning to him, and holding the light to my own face, “who am I?”

¹⁶⁴“He gazed at me with bleared, drunken eyes for a moment, and then I saw a horror spring up in them, and convulse his whole features, which showed me that he knew me. ¹⁶⁵He staggered back with a livid face, and I saw the perspiration break out upon his brow, while his teeth chattered in his head. ¹⁶⁶At the sight, I leaned my back against the door and laughed loud and long. ¹⁶⁷I had always known that vengeance would be sweet, but I had never hoped for the contentment of soul which now possessed me.

¹⁶⁸“You dog!” I said; ¹⁶⁹“I have hunted you from Salt Lake City to St. Petersburg, and you have always escaped me. ¹⁷⁰Now, at last your wanderings have come to an end, for either you or I shall never see tomorrow's sun rise.” ¹⁷¹He shrunk still further away as I spoke, and I could see on his face that he thought I was mad. ¹⁷²So I was for the time. ¹⁷³The pulses in my temples beat like sledge-hammers, and I believe I would have had a fit of some sort if the blood had not gushed from my nose and relieved me.

¹⁷⁴“What do you think of Lucy Ferrier now?” I cried, locking the door, and shaking the key in his face. ¹⁷⁵“Punishment has been slow in coming, but it has overtaken you at last.” ¹⁷⁶I saw his coward lips tremble as I spoke. ¹⁷⁷He would have begged for his life, but he knew well that it was useless.

¹⁷⁸“Would you murder me?” he stammered.

¹⁷⁹“There is no murder,” I answered. ¹⁸⁰“Who talks of murdering a mad dog?” ¹⁸¹“What mercy had you upon my poor darling, when you dragged her from her slaughtered father, and bore her away to your accursed and shameless harem.”

¹⁸²“It was not I who killed her father,” he cried.

¹⁸³“But it was you who broke her innocent heart,” I shrieked, thrusting the box before him. ¹⁸⁴“Let the high God judge between us. ¹⁸⁵Choose and eat. ¹⁸⁶There is death in one and life in the other. ¹⁸⁷I shall take what you leave. ¹⁸⁸Let us see if there is justice upon the earth, or if we are ruled by chance.”

¹⁸⁹“He cowered away with wild cries and prayers for mercy, but I drew my knife and held it to his throat until he had obeyed me. ¹⁹⁰Then I swallowed the other, and we stood facing one another in silence for a minute or more, waiting to see which was to live and which was to die. ¹⁹¹Shall I ever forget the look which came over his face when the first warning pangs told him that the poison was in his system? ¹⁹²I laughed as I saw it, and held Lucy's marriage ring in front of his eyes. ¹⁹³It was but for a moment, for the action of the alkaloid is rapid. ¹⁹⁴A spasm of pain contorted his features; he threw his hands out in front of him, staggered, and then, with a hoarse cry, fell heavily upon the floor. ¹⁹⁵I turned him over with my foot, and placed my hand upon his heart. ¹⁹⁶There was no movement. ¹⁹⁷He was dead!

¹⁹⁸“The blood had been streaming from my nose, but I had taken no notice of it. ¹⁹⁹I don't know what it was that put it into my head to write upon the wall with it. ²⁰⁰Perhaps it was some mischievous idea of setting the police upon a wrong track, for I felt light-hearted and cheerful. ²⁰¹I remembered a German being found in New York with RACHE written up above him, and it was argued at the time in the newspapers that the secret societies must have done it. ²⁰²I guessed that what puzzled the New Yorkers would puzzle the Londoners, so I dipped my finger in my own blood and printed it on a convenient place on the wall. ²⁰³Then I walked down to my cab and found that there was nobody about, and that the night was still very wild. ²⁰⁴I had driven some distance when I put my hand into the pocket in which I usually kept Lucy's ring, and found that it was not there. ²⁰⁵I was thunderstruck at this, for it was the only memento that I had of her. ²⁰⁶Thinking that I might have dropped it when I stooped over Drebbler's body, I drove back, and leaving my cab in a side street, I went boldly up to the house—for I was ready to dare anything rather than lose the ring. ²⁰⁷When I arrived there, I walked right into the arms of a

police-officer who was coming out, and only managed to disarm his suspicions by pretending to be hopelessly drunk.

²⁰⁸“That was how Enoch Drebbler came to his end. ²⁰⁹All I had to do then was to do as much for Stangerson, and so pay off John Ferrier's debt. ²¹⁰I knew that he was staying at Halliday's Private Hotel, and I hung about all day, but he never came out. ²¹¹I fancy that he suspected something when Drebbler failed to put in an appearance. ²¹²He was cunning, was Stangerson, and always on his guard. ²¹³If he thought he could keep me off by staying indoors he was very much mistaken. ²¹⁴I soon found out which was the window of his bedroom, and early next morning I took advantage of some ladders which were lying in the lane behind the hotel, and so made my way into his room in the grey of the dawn. ²¹⁵I woke him up and told him that the hour had come when he was to answer for the life he had taken so long before. ²¹⁶I described Drebbler's death to him, and I gave him the same choice of the poisoned pills. ²¹⁷Instead of grasping at the chance of safety which that offered him, he sprang from his bed and flew at my throat. ²¹⁸In self-defence I stabbed him to the heart. ²¹⁹It would have been the same in any case, for Providence would never have allowed his guilty hand to pick out anything but the poison.

²²⁰“I have little more to say, and it's as well, for I am about done up. ²²¹I went on cabbng it for a day or so, intending to keep at it until I could save enough to take me back to America. ²²²I was standing in the yard when a ragged youngster asked if there was a cabby there called Jefferson Hope, and said that his cab was wanted by a gentleman at 221b, Baker Street. ²²³I went round, suspecting no harm, and the next thing I knew, this young man here had the bracelets on my wrists, and as neatly snackled as ever I saw in my life. ²²⁴That's the whole of my story, gentlemen. ²²⁵You may consider me to be a murderer; but I hold that I am just as much an officer of justice as you are.”

²²⁶So thrilling had the man's narrative been, and his manner was so impressive that we had sat silent and absorbed. ²²⁷Even the professional detectives, blase as they were in every detail of crime, appeared to be keenly interested in the man's story. ²²⁸When he finished we sat for some minutes in a stillness which was only broken by the scratching of Lestrade's pencil as he gave the finishing touches to his shorthand account.

²²⁹“There is only one point on which I should like a little more information,” Sherlock Holmes said at last. ²³⁰“Who was your accomplice who came for the ring which I advertised?”

²³¹The prisoner winked at my friend jocosely. ²³²“I can tell my own secrets,” he said, “but I don't get other people into trouble. ²³³I saw your advertisement, and I thought it might be a plant, or it might be the ring which I wanted. ²³⁴My friend volunteered to go and see. ²³⁵I think you'll own he did it smartly.”

²³⁶“Not a doubt of that,” said Holmes heartily.

²³⁷“Now, gentlemen,” the Inspector remarked gravely, “the forms of the law must be complied with. ²³⁸On Thursday the prisoner will be brought before the magistrates, and your attendance will be required. ²³⁹Until then I will be responsible for him.” ²⁴⁰He rang the bell as he spoke, and Jefferson Hope was led off by a couple of warders, while my friend and I made our way out of the Station and took a cab back to Baker Street.

Chapter XIV.

The Conclusion

¹We had all been warned to appear before the magistrates upon the Thursday; but when the Thursday came there was no occasion for our testimony. ²A higher Judge had taken the matter in hand, and Jefferson Hope had been summoned before a tribunal where strict justice would be meted out to him. ³On the very night after his capture the aneurism burst, and he was found in the morning stretched upon the floor of the cell, with a placid smile upon his face, as though he had been able in his dying moments to look back upon a useful life, and on work well done.

⁴"Gregson and Lestrade will be wild about his death," Holmes remarked, as we chatted it over next evening. ⁵"Where will their grand advertisement be now?"

⁶"I don't see that they had very much to do with his capture," I answered.

⁷"What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence," returned my companion, bitterly. ⁸"The question is, what can you make people believe that you have done. ⁹Never mind," he continued, more brightly, after a pause. ¹⁰"I would not have missed the investigation for anything. ¹¹There has been no better case within my recollection. ¹²Simple as it was, there were several most instructive points about it."

¹³"Simple!" I ejaculated.

¹⁴"Well, really, it can hardly be described as otherwise," said Sherlock Holmes, smiling at my surprise. ¹⁵"The proof of its intrinsic simplicity is, that without any help save a few very ordinary deductions I was able to lay my hand upon the criminal within three days."

¹⁶"That is true," said I.

¹⁷"I have already explained to you that what is out of the common is usually a guide rather than a hindrance. ¹⁸In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards. ¹⁹That is a very useful accomplishment, and a very easy one, but people do not practise it much. ²⁰In the everyday affairs of life it is more useful to reason forwards, and so the other comes to be neglected. ²¹There are fifty who can reason synthetically for one who can reason analytically."

²²"I confess," said I, "that I do not quite follow you."

²³"I hardly expected that you would. Let me see if I can make it clearer. ²⁴Most people, if you describe a train of events to them, will tell you what the result would be. ²⁵They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass. ²⁶There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. ²⁷This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backwards, or analytically."

²⁸"I understand," said I.

²⁹"Now this was a case in which you were given the result and had to find everything else for yourself. ³⁰Now let me endeavour to show you the different steps in my reasoning. ³¹To begin at the beginning. ³²I approached the house, as you know, on foot, and with my mind entirely free from all impressions. ³³I naturally began by examining the roadway, and there, as I have already explained to you, I saw clearly the marks of a cab, which, I ascertained by inquiry, must have been there during the night. ³⁴I satisfied myself that it was a cab and not a private carriage by the narrow gauge of the wheels. ³⁵The ordinary London growler is considerably less wide than a gentleman's brougham.

³⁶“This was the first point gained. ³⁷I then walked slowly down the garden path, which happened to be composed of a clay soil, peculiarly suitable for taking impressions. ³⁸No doubt it appeared to you to be a mere trampled line of slush, but to my trained eyes every mark upon its surface had a meaning. ³⁹There is no branch of detective science which is so important and so much neglected as the art of tracing footsteps. ⁴⁰Happily, I have always laid great stress upon it, and much practice has made it second nature to me. ⁴¹I saw the heavy footmarks of the constables, but I saw also the track of the two men who had first passed through the garden. ⁴²It was easy to tell that they had been before the others, because in places their marks had been entirely obliterated by the others coming upon the top of them. ⁴³In this way my second link was formed, which told me that the nocturnal visitors were two in number, one remarkable for his height (as I calculated from the length of his stride), and the other fashionably dressed, to judge from the small and elegant impression left by his boots.

⁴⁴“On entering the house this last inference was confirmed. ⁴⁵My well-booted man lay before me. ⁴⁶The tall one, then, had done the murder, if murder there was. ⁴⁷There was no wound upon the dead man's person, but the agitated expression upon his face assured me that he had foreseen his fate before it came upon him. ⁴⁸Men who die from heart disease, or any sudden natural cause, never by any chance exhibit agitation upon their features. ⁴⁹Having sniffed the dead man's lips I detected a slightly sour smell, and I came to the conclusion that he had had poison forced upon him. ⁵⁰Again, I argued that it had been forced upon him from the hatred and fear expressed upon his face. ⁵¹By the method of exclusion, I had arrived at this result, for no other hypothesis would meet the facts. ⁵²Do not imagine that it was a very unheard of idea. ⁵³The forcible administration of poison is by no means a new thing in criminal annals. ⁵⁴The cases of Dolsky in Odessa, and of Leturier in Montpellier, will occur at once to any toxicologist.

⁵⁵“And now came the great question as to the reason why. ⁵⁶Robbery had not been the object of the murder, for nothing was taken. ⁵⁷Was it politics, then, or was it a woman? ⁵⁸That was the question which confronted me. ⁵⁹I was inclined from the first to the latter supposition. ⁶⁰Political assassins are only too glad to do their work and to fly. ⁶¹This murder had, on the contrary, been done most deliberately, and the perpetrator had left his tracks all over the room, showing that he had been there all the time. ⁶²It must have been a private wrong, and not a political one, which called for such a methodical revenge. ⁶³When the inscription was discovered upon the wall I was more inclined than ever to my opinion. ⁶⁴The thing was too evidently a blind. ⁶⁵When the ring was found, however, it settled the question. ⁶⁶Clearly the murderer had used it to remind his victim of some dead or absent woman. ⁶⁷It was at this point that I asked Gregson whether he had enquired in his telegram to Cleveland as to any particular point in Mr. Drebber's former career. ⁶⁸He answered, you remember, in the negative.

⁶⁹“I then proceeded to make a careful examination of the room, which confirmed me in my opinion as to the murderer's height, and furnished me with the additional details as to the Trichinopoly cigar and the length of his nails. ⁷⁰I had already come to the conclusion, since there were no signs of a struggle, that the blood which covered the floor had burst from the murderer's nose in his excitement. ⁷¹I could perceive that the track of blood coincided with the track of his feet. ⁷²It is seldom that any man, unless he is very full-blooded, breaks out in this way through emotion, so I hazarded the opinion that the criminal was probably a robust and ruddy-faced man. ⁷³Events proved that I had judged correctly.

⁷⁴“Having left the house, I proceeded to do what Gregson had neglected. ⁷⁵I telegraphed to the head of the police at Cleveland, limiting my enquiry to the circumstances connected with the marriage of Enoch Drebber. ⁷⁶The answer was conclusive. ⁷⁷It told me that Drebber had already applied for the protection of the law against an old rival in love, named Jefferson Hope, and that this same Hope was at present in Europe. ⁷⁸I knew now that I held the clue to the mystery in my hand, and all that remained was to secure the murderer.

⁷⁹“I had already determined in my own mind that the man who had walked into the house with Drebber, was none other than the man who had driven the cab. ⁸⁰The marks in the road showed me that the horse had wandered on in a way which would have been impossible had there been anyone in charge of it.

⁸¹Where, then, could the driver be, unless he were inside the house? ⁸²Again, it is absurd to suppose that any sane man would carry out a deliberate crime under the very eyes, as it were, of a third person, who was sure to betray him. ⁸³Lastly, supposing one man wished to dog another through London, what better means could he adopt than to turn cabdriver. ⁸⁴All these considerations led me to the irresistible conclusion that Jefferson Hope was to be found among the jarveys of the Metropolis.

⁸⁵"If he had been one there was no reason to believe that he had ceased to be. ⁸⁶On the contrary, from his point of view, any sudden chance would be likely to draw attention to himself. ⁸⁷He would, probably, for a time at least, continue to perform his duties. ⁸⁸There was no reason to suppose that he was going under an assumed name. ⁸⁹Why should he change his name in a country where no one knew his original one? ⁹⁰I therefore organized my Street Arab detective corps, and sent them systematically to every cab proprietor in London until they ferreted out the man that I wanted. ⁹¹How well they succeeded, and how quickly I took advantage of it, are still fresh in your recollection. ⁹²The murder of Stangerson was an incident which was entirely unexpected, but which could hardly in any case have been prevented. ⁹³Through it, as you know, I came into possession of the pills, the existence of which I had already surmised. ⁹⁴You see the whole thing is a chain of logical sequences without a break or flaw."

⁹⁵"It is wonderful!" I cried. ⁹⁶"Your merits should be publicly recognized. ⁹⁷You should publish an account of the case. ⁹⁸If you won't, I will for you."

⁹⁹"You may do what you like, Doctor," he answered. ¹⁰⁰"See here!" he continued, handing a paper over to me, "look at this!"

¹⁰¹It was the Echo for the day, and the paragraph to which he pointed was devoted to the case in question.

¹⁰²"The public," it said, "have lost a sensational treat through the sudden death of the man Hope, who was suspected of the murder of Mr. Enoch Drebber and of Mr. Joseph Stangerson. ¹⁰³The details of the case will probably be never known now, though we are informed upon good authority that the crime was the result of an old standing and romantic feud, in which love and Mormonism bore a part. ¹⁰⁴It seems that both the victims belonged, in their younger days, to the Latter Day Saints, and Hope, the deceased prisoner, hails also from Salt Lake City. ¹⁰⁵If the case has had no other effect, it, at least, brings out in the most striking manner the efficiency of our detective police force, and will serve as a lesson to all foreigners that they will do wisely to settle their feuds at home, and not to carry them on to British soil. ¹⁰⁶It is an open secret that the credit of this smart capture belongs entirely to the well-known Scotland Yard officials, Messrs. Lestrade and Gregson. ¹⁰⁷The man was apprehended, it appears, in the rooms of a certain Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who has himself, as an amateur, shown some talent in the detective line, and who, with such instructors, may hope in time to attain to some degree of their skill. ¹⁰⁸It is expected that a testimonial of some sort will be presented to the two officers as a fitting recognition of their services."

¹⁰⁹"Didn't I tell you so when we started?" cried Sherlock Holmes with a laugh. ¹¹⁰"That's the result of all our Study in Scarlet: to get them a testimonial!"

¹¹¹"Never mind," I answered, "I have all the facts in my journal, and the public shall know them. ¹¹²In the meantime you must make yourself contented by the consciousness of success, like the Roman miser—

¹¹³"*Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo*

¹¹⁴*Ipse domi simul ac nummos contemplar in arca.*"

The Sign of the Four

Chapter I.

The Science of Deduction

¹Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. ²With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. ³For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. ⁴Finally he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction.

⁵Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but custom had not reconciled my mind to it. ⁶On the contrary, from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. ⁷Again and again I had registered a vow that I should deliver my soul upon the subject, but there was that in the cool, nonchalant air of my companion which made him the last man with whom one would care to take anything approaching to a liberty. ⁸His great powers, his masterly manner, and the experience which I had had of his many extraordinary qualities, all made me diffident and backward in crossing him.

⁹Yet upon that afternoon, whether it was the Beaune which I had taken with my lunch, or the additional exasperation produced by the extreme deliberation of his manner, I suddenly felt that I could hold out no longer.

¹⁰“Which is it to-day?” I asked,—“morphine or cocaine?”

¹¹He raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he had opened. ¹²“It is cocaine,” he said,—“a seven-per-cent solution. ¹³Would you care to try it?”

¹⁴“No, indeed,” I answered, brusquely. ¹⁵“My constitution has not got over the Afghan campaign yet. ¹⁶I cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon it.”

¹⁷He smiled at my vehemence. ¹⁸“Perhaps you are right, Watson,” he said. ¹⁹“I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. ²⁰I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment.”

²¹“But consider!” I said, earnestly. ²²“Count the cost! ²³Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. ²⁴You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon you. ²⁵Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. ²⁶Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed? ²⁷Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable.”

²⁸He did not seem offended. ²⁹On the contrary, he put his fingertips together and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, like one who has a relish for conversation.

³⁰“My mind,” he said, “rebels at stagnation. ³¹Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. ³²I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. ³³But I abhor the dull routine of existence. ³⁴I crave for mental exaltation. ³⁵That is why I have chosen my own particular profession,—or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.”

³⁶“The only unofficial detective?” I said, raising my eyebrows.

³⁷“The only unofficial consulting detective,” he answered. ³⁸“I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection. ³⁹When Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their normal state—the matter is laid before me. ⁴⁰I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist's opinion. ⁴¹I claim no credit in such cases. ⁴²My name figures in no newspaper. ⁴³The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward. ⁴⁴But you have yourself had some experience of my methods of work in the Jefferson Hope case.”

⁴⁵“Yes, indeed,” said I, cordially. ⁴⁶“I was never so struck by anything in my life. ⁴⁷I even embodied it in a small brochure with the somewhat fantastic title of ‘A Study in Scarlet.’”

⁴⁸He shook his head sadly. ⁴⁹“I glanced over it,” said he. ⁵⁰“Honestly, I cannot congratulate you upon it. ⁵¹Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. ⁵²You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.”

⁵³“But the romance was there,” I remonstrated. ⁵⁴“I could not tamper with the facts.”

⁵⁵“Some facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. ⁵⁶The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes by which I succeeded in unraveling it.”

⁵⁷I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially designed to please him. ⁵⁸I confess, too, that I was irritated by the egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be devoted to his own special doings. ⁵⁹More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. ⁶⁰I made no remark, however, but sat nursing my wounded leg. ⁶¹I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before, and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it ached wearily at every change of the weather.

⁶²“My practice has extended recently to the Continent,” said Holmes, after a while, filling up his old brier-root pipe. ⁶³“I was consulted last week by Francois Le Villard, who, as you probably know, has come rather to the front lately in the French detective service. ⁶⁴He has all the Celtic power of quick intuition, but he is deficient in the wide range of exact knowledge which is essential to the higher developments of his art. ⁶⁵The case was concerned with a will, and possessed some features of interest. ⁶⁶I was able to refer him to two parallel cases, the one at Riga in 1857, and the other at St. Louis in 1871, which have suggested to him the true solution. ⁶⁷Here is the letter which I had this morning acknowledging my assistance.” ⁶⁸He tossed over, as he spoke, a crumpled sheet of foreign notepaper. ⁶⁹I glanced my eyes down it, catching a profusion of notes of admiration, with stray magnifiques, coup-de-mâitres and tours-de-force, all testifying to the ardent admiration of the Frenchman.

⁷⁰“He speaks as a pupil to his master,” said I.

⁷¹“Oh, he rates my assistance too highly,” said Sherlock Holmes, lightly. ⁷²“He has considerable gifts himself. ⁷³He possesses two out of the three qualities necessary for the ideal detective. ⁷⁴He has the power of observation and that of deduction. ⁷⁵He is only wanting in knowledge; and that may come in time. ⁷⁶He is now translating my small works into French.”

⁷⁷“Your works?”

⁷⁸“Oh, didn't you know?” he cried, laughing. ⁷⁹“Yes, I have been guilty of several monographs. ⁸⁰They are all upon technical subjects. ⁸¹Here, for example, is one ‘Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos.’ ⁸²In it I enumerate a hundred and forty forms of cigar-, cigarette-, and pipe-tobacco, with colored plates illustrating the difference in the ash. ⁸³It is a point which is continually turning up in criminal trials, and which is sometimes of supreme importance as a clue. ⁸⁴If you can say definitely, for example, that some murder has been done by a man who was smoking an Indian lunkah,

it obviously narrows your field of search. ⁸⁵To the trained eye there is as much difference between the black ash of a Trichinopoly and the white fluff of bird's-eye as there is between a cabbage and a potato.”

⁸⁶“You have an extraordinary genius for minutiae,” I remarked.

⁸⁷“I appreciate their importance. ⁸⁸Here is my monograph upon the tracing of footsteps, with some remarks upon the uses of plaster of Paris as a preserver of impresses. ⁸⁹Here, too, is a curious little work upon the influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with lithotypes of the hands of slaters, sailors, corkcutters, compositors, weavers, and diamond-polishers. ⁹⁰That is a matter of great practical interest to the scientific detective,—especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in discovering the antecedents of criminals. ⁹¹But I weary you with my hobby.”

⁹²“Not at all,” I answered, earnestly. ⁹³“It is of the greatest interest to me, especially since I have had the opportunity of observing your practical application of it. ⁹⁴But you spoke just now of observation and deduction. ⁹⁵Surely the one to some extent implies the other.”

⁹⁶“Why, hardly,” he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his armchair, and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. ⁹⁷“For example, observation shows me that you have been to the Wigmore Street Post-Office this morning, but deduction lets me know that when there you dispatched a telegram.”

⁹⁸“Right!” said I. ⁹⁹“Right on both points! ¹⁰⁰But I confess that I don't see how you arrived at it. ¹⁰¹It was a sudden impulse upon my part, and I have mentioned it to no one.”

¹⁰²“It is simplicity itself,” he remarked, chuckling at my surprise,—“so absurdly simple that an explanation is superfluous; and yet it may serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. ¹⁰³Observation tells me that you have a little reddish mould adhering to your instep. ¹⁰⁴Just opposite the Seymour Street Office they have taken up the pavement and thrown up some earth which lies in such a way that it is difficult to avoid treading in it in entering. ¹⁰⁵The earth is of this peculiar reddish tint which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the neighborhood. ¹⁰⁶So much is observation. ¹⁰⁷The rest is deduction.”

¹⁰⁸“How, then, did you deduce the telegram?”

¹⁰⁹“Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite to you all morning. ¹¹⁰I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of postcards. ¹¹¹What could you go into the post-office for, then, but to send a wire? ¹¹²Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”

¹¹³“In this case it certainly is so,” I replied, after a little thought. ¹¹⁴“The thing, however, is, as you say, of the simplest. ¹¹⁵Would you think me impertinent if I were to put your theories to a more severe test?”

¹¹⁶“On the contrary,” he answered, “it would prevent me from taking a second dose of cocaine. ¹¹⁷I should be delighted to look into any problem which you might submit to me.”

¹¹⁸“I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it. ¹¹⁹Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. ¹²⁰Would you have the kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the late owner?”

¹²¹I handed him over the watch with some slight feeling of amusement in my heart, for the test was, as I thought, an impossible one, and I intended it as a lesson against the somewhat dogmatic tone which he occasionally assumed. ¹²²He balanced the watch in his hand, gazed hard at the dial, opened the back, and examined the works, first with his naked eyes and then with a powerful convex lens. ¹²³I could hardly keep from smiling at his crestfallen face when he finally snapped the case to and handed it back.

¹²⁴“There are hardly any data,” he remarked. ¹²⁵“The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts.”

¹²⁶“You are right,” I answered. ¹²⁷“It was cleaned before being sent to me.” ¹²⁸In my heart I accused my companion of putting forward a most lame and impotent excuse to cover his failure. ¹²⁹What data could he expect from an uncleaned watch?

¹³⁰“Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely barren,” he observed, staring up at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes. ¹³¹“Subject to your correction, I should judge that the watch belonged to your elder brother, who inherited it from your father.”

¹³²“That you gather, no doubt, from the H. W. upon the back?”

¹³³“Quite so. ¹³⁴The W. suggests your own name. ¹³⁵The date of the watch is nearly fifty years back, and the initials are as old as the watch: so it was made for the last generation. ¹³⁶Jewelry usually descends to the eldest son, and he is most likely to have the same name as the father. ¹³⁷Your father has, if I remember right, been dead many years. ¹³⁸It has, therefore, been in the hands of your eldest brother.”

¹³⁹“Right, so far,” said I. ¹⁴⁰“Anything else?”

¹⁴¹“He was a man of untidy habits,—very untidy and careless. ¹⁴²He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally, taking to drink, he died. ¹⁴³That is all I can gather.”

¹⁴⁴I sprang from my chair and limped impatiently about the room with considerable bitterness in my heart.

¹⁴⁵“This is unworthy of you, Holmes,” I said. ¹⁴⁶“I could not have believed that you would have descended to this. ¹⁴⁷You have made inquiries into the history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this knowledge in some fanciful way. ¹⁴⁸You cannot expect me to believe that you have read all this from his old watch! ¹⁴⁹It is unkind, and, to speak plainly, has a touch of charlatanism in it.”

¹⁵⁰“My dear doctor,” said he, kindly, “pray accept my apologies. ¹⁵¹Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you. ¹⁵²I assure you, however, that I never even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch.”

¹⁵³“Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts? ¹⁵⁴They are absolutely correct in every particular.”

¹⁵⁵“Ah, that is good luck. ¹⁵⁶I could only say what was the balance of probability. ¹⁵⁷I did not at all expect to be so accurate.”

¹⁵⁸“But it was not mere guess-work?”

¹⁵⁹“No, no: I never guess. ¹⁶⁰It is a shocking habit,—destructive to the logical faculty. ¹⁶¹What seems strange to you is only so because you do not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which large inferences may depend. ¹⁶²For example, I began by stating that your brother was careless. ¹⁶³When you observe the lower part of that watch-case you notice that it is not only dented in two places, but it is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard objects, such as coins or keys, in the same pocket. ¹⁶⁴Surely it is no great feat to assume that a man who treats a fifty-guinea watch so cavalierly must be a careless man. ¹⁶⁵Neither is it a very far-fetched inference that a man who inherits one article of such value is pretty well provided for in other respects.”

¹⁶⁶I nodded, to show that I followed his reasoning.

¹⁶⁷“It is very customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a watch, to scratch the number of the ticket with a pin-point upon the inside of the case. ¹⁶⁸It is more handy than a label, as there is no risk of the number being lost or transposed. ¹⁶⁹There are no less than four such numbers visible to my lens on the inside of this case. Inference,—that your brother was often at low water. ¹⁷⁰Secondary inference,—that he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not have redeemed the pledge. ¹⁷¹Finally, I ask you to look at the inner plate, which contains the key-hole. ¹⁷²Look at the thousands of scratches all round the hole,—marks where the key has slipped. ¹⁷³What sober man's key could have scored those grooves? ¹⁷⁴But you will never see a drunkard's watch without them. ¹⁷⁵He winds it at night, and he leaves these traces of his unsteady hand. ¹⁷⁶Where is the mystery in all this?”

¹⁷⁷“It is as clear as daylight,” I answered. ¹⁷⁸“I regret the injustice which I did you. ¹⁷⁹I should have had more faith in your marvellous faculty. ¹⁸⁰May I ask whether you have any professional inquiry on foot at present?”

¹⁸¹“None. ¹⁸²Hence the cocaine. ¹⁸³I cannot live without brain-work. ¹⁸⁴What else is there to live for? ¹⁸⁵Stand at the window here. ¹⁸⁶Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? ¹⁸⁷See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the duncolored houses. ¹⁸⁸What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? ¹⁸⁹What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? ¹⁹⁰Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth.”

¹⁹¹I had opened my mouth to reply to this tirade, when with a crisp knock our landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver.

¹⁹²“A young lady for you, sir,” she said, addressing my companion.

¹⁹³“Miss Mary Morstan,” he read. ¹⁹⁴“Hum! ¹⁹⁵I have no recollection of the name. ¹⁹⁶Ask the young lady to step up, Mrs. Hudson. ¹⁹⁷Don't go, doctor. ¹⁹⁸I should prefer that you remain.”

Chapter II.

The Statement of the Case

¹Miss Morstan entered the room with a firm step and an outward composure of manner. ²She was a blonde young lady, small, dainty, well gloved, and dressed in the most perfect taste. ³There was, however, a plainness and simplicity about her costume which bore with it a suggestion of limited means. ⁴The dress was a sombre grayish beige, untrimmed and unbraided, and she wore a small turban of the same dull hue, relieved only by a suspicion of white feather in the side. ⁵Her face had neither regularity of feature nor beauty of complexion, but her expression was sweet and amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and sympathetic. ⁶In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents, I have never looked upon a face which gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature. ⁷I could not but observe that as she took the seat which Sherlock Holmes placed for her, her lip trembled, her hand quivered, and she showed every sign of intense inward agitation.

⁸"I have come to you, Mr. Holmes," she said, "because you once enabled my employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester, to unravel a little domestic complication. ⁹She was much impressed by your kindness and skill."

¹⁰"Mrs. Cecil Forrester," he repeated thoughtfully. ¹¹"I believe that I was of some slight service to her. ¹²The case, however, as I remember it, was a very simple one."

¹³"She did not think so. ¹⁴But at least you cannot say the same of mine. ¹⁵I can hardly imagine anything more strange, more utterly inexplicable, than the situation in which I find myself."

¹⁶Holmes rubbed his hands, and his eyes glistened. ¹⁷He leaned forward in his chair with an expression of extraordinary concentration upon his clear-cut, hawklike features. ¹⁸"State your case," said he, in brisk, business tones.

¹⁹I felt that my position was an embarrassing one. ²⁰"You will, I am sure, excuse me," I said, rising from my chair.

²¹To my surprise, the young lady held up her gloved hand to detain me. ²²"If your friend," she said, "would be good enough to stop, he might be of inestimable service to me."

²³I relapsed into my chair.

²⁴"Briefly," she continued, "the facts are these. ²⁵My father was an officer in an Indian regiment who sent me home when I was quite a child. ²⁶My mother was dead, and I had no relative in England. ²⁷I was placed, however, in a comfortable boarding establishment at Edinburgh, and there I remained until I was seventeen years of age. ²⁸In the year 1878 my father, who was senior captain of his regiment, obtained twelve months' leave and came home. ²⁹He telegraphed to me from London that he had arrived all safe, and directed me to come down at once, giving the Langham Hotel as his address. ³⁰His message, as I remember, was full of kindness and love. ³¹On reaching London I drove to the Langham, and was informed that Captain Morstan was staying there, but that he had gone out the night before and had not yet returned. ³²I waited all day without news of him. ³³That night, on the advice of the manager of the hotel, I communicated with the police, and next morning we advertised in all the papers. ³⁴Our inquiries let to no result; and from that day to this no word has ever been heard of my unfortunate father. ³⁵He came home with his heart full of hope, to find some peace, some comfort, and instead—" ³⁶She put her hand to her throat, and a choking sob cut short the sentence.

³⁷"The date?" asked Holmes, opening his note-book.

³⁸“He disappeared upon the 3d of December, 1878,—nearly ten years ago.”

³⁹“His luggage?”

⁴⁰“Remained at the hotel. ⁴¹There was nothing in it to suggest a clue,—some clothes, some books, and a considerable number of curiosities from the Andaman Islands. ⁴²He had been one of the officers in charge of the convict-guard there.”

⁴³“Had he any friends in town?”

⁴⁴“Only one that we know of,—Major Sholto, of his own regiment, the 34th Bombay Infantry. ⁴⁵The major had retired some little time before, and lived at Upper Norwood. ⁴⁶We communicated with him, of course, but he did not even know that his brother officer was in England.”

⁴⁷“A singular case,” remarked Holmes.

⁴⁸“I have not yet described to you the most singular part. ⁴⁹About six years ago—to be exact, upon the 4th of May, 1882—an advertisement appeared in the Times asking for the address of Miss Mary Morstan and stating that it would be to her advantage to come forward. ⁵⁰There was no name or address appended. ⁵¹I had at that time just entered the family of Mrs. Cecil Forrester in the capacity of governess. ⁵²By her advice I published my address in the advertisement column. ⁵³The same day there arrived through the post a small card-board box addressed to me, which I found to contain a very large and lustrous pearl. ⁵⁴No word of writing was enclosed. ⁵⁵Since then every year upon the same date there has always appeared a similar box, containing a similar pearl, without any clue as to the sender. ⁵⁶They have been pronounced by an expert to be of a rare variety and of considerable value. ⁵⁷You can see for yourselves that they are very handsome.” ⁵⁸She opened a flat box as she spoke, and showed me six of the finest pearls that I had ever seen.

⁵⁹“Your statement is most interesting,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁶⁰“Has anything else occurred to you?”

⁶¹“Yes, and no later than to-day. ⁶²That is why I have come to you. ⁶³This morning I received this letter, which you will perhaps read for yourself.”

⁶⁴“Thank you,” said Holmes. ⁶⁵“The envelope too, please. ⁶⁶Postmark, London, S.W. Date, July 7. ⁶⁷Hum! ⁶⁸Man's thumb-mark on corner,—probably postman. ⁶⁹Best quality paper. ⁷⁰Envelopes at sixpence a packet. ⁷¹Particular man in his stationery. ⁷²No address. ⁷³Be at the third pillar from the left outside the Lyceum Theatre to-night at seven o'clock. ⁷⁴If you are distrustful, bring two friends. ⁷⁵You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice. ⁷⁶Do not bring police. ⁷⁷If you do, all will be in vain. ⁷⁸Your unknown friend.’ ⁷⁹Well, really, this is a very pretty little mystery. ⁸⁰What do you intend to do, Miss Morstan?”

⁸¹“That is exactly what I want to ask you.”

⁸²“Then we shall most certainly go. ⁸³You and I and—yes, why, Dr. Watson is the very man. ⁸⁴Your correspondent says two friends. ⁸⁵He and I have worked together before.”

⁸⁶“But would he come?” she asked, with something appealing in her voice and expression.

⁸⁷“I should be proud and happy,” said I, fervently, “if I can be of any service.”

⁸⁸“You are both very kind,” she answered. ⁸⁹“I have led a retired life, and have no friends whom I could appeal to. ⁹⁰If I am here at six it will do, I suppose?”

⁹¹“You must not be later,” said Holmes. ⁹²“There is one other point, however. ⁹³Is this handwriting the same as that upon the pearl-box addresses?”

⁹⁴“I have them here,” she answered, producing half a dozen pieces of paper.

⁹⁵“You are certainly a model client. ⁹⁶You have the correct intuition. ⁹⁷Let us see, now.” ⁹⁸He spread out the papers upon the table, and gave little darting glances from one to the other. ⁹⁹“They are disguised hands, except the letter,” he said, presently, “but there can be no question as to the authorship. ¹⁰⁰See how the irrepressible Greek e will break out, and see the twirl of the final s. ¹⁰¹They are undoubtedly by the same person. ¹⁰²I should not like to suggest false hopes, Miss Morstan, but is there any resemblance between this hand and that of your father?”

¹⁰³“Nothing could be more unlike.”

¹⁰⁴“I expected to hear you say so. ¹⁰⁵We shall look out for you, then, at six. ¹⁰⁶Pray allow me to keep the papers. ¹⁰⁷I may look into the matter before then. ¹⁰⁸It is only half-past three. ¹⁰⁹Au revoir, then.”

¹¹⁰“Au revoir,” said our visitor, and, with a bright, kindly glance from one to the other of us, she replaced her pearl-box in her bosom and hurried away. ¹¹¹Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly down the street, until the gray turban and white feather were but a speck in the sombre crowd.

¹¹²“What a very attractive woman!” I exclaimed, turning to my companion.

¹¹³He had lit his pipe again, and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. ¹¹⁴“Is she?” he said, languidly. ¹¹⁵“I did not observe.”

¹¹⁶“You really are an automaton,—a calculating-machine!” I cried. ¹¹⁷“There is something positively inhuman in you at times.”

¹¹⁸He smiled gently. ¹¹⁹“It is of the first importance,” he said, “not to allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. ¹²⁰A client is to me a mere unit,—a factor in a problem. ¹²¹The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. ¹²²I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor.”

¹²³“In this case, however—”

¹²⁴“I never make exceptions. ¹²⁵An exception disproves the rule. ¹²⁶Have you ever had occasion to study character in handwriting? ¹²⁷What do you make of this fellow's scribble?”

¹²⁸“It is legible and regular,” I answered. ¹²⁹“A man of business habits and some force of character.”

¹³⁰Holmes shook his head. ¹³¹“Look at his long letters,” he said. ¹³²“They hardly rise above the common herd. ¹³³That d might be an a, and that l an e. ¹³⁴Men of character always differentiate their long letters, however illegibly they may write. ¹³⁵There is vacillation in his k's and self-esteem in his capitals. ¹³⁶I am going out now. ¹³⁷I have some few references to make. ¹³⁸Let me recommend this book,—one of the most remarkable ever penned. ¹³⁹It is Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*. ¹⁴⁰I shall be back in an hour.”

¹⁴¹I sat in the window with the volume in my hand, but my thoughts were far from the daring speculations of the writer. ¹⁴²My mind ran upon our late visitor,—her smiles, the deep rich tones of her voice, the strange mystery which overhung her life. ¹⁴³If she were seventeen at the time of her father's disappearance she must be seven-and-twenty now,—a sweet age, when youth has lost its self-consciousness and become a little sobered by experience. ¹⁴⁴So I sat and mused, until such dangerous thoughts came into my head that I hurried away to my desk and plunged furiously into the latest treatise upon pathology. ¹⁴⁵What was I, an army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking-account, that I should dare to think of such things? ¹⁴⁶She was a unit, a factor,—nothing more. ¹⁴⁷If my future were black, it was better surely to face it like a man than to attempt to brighten it by mere will-o'-the-wisps of the imagination.

Chapter III.

In Quest of a Solution

¹It was half-past five before Holmes returned. ²He was bright, eager, and in excellent spirits,—a mood which in his case alternated with fits of the blackest depression.

³“There is no great mystery in this matter,” he said, taking the cup of tea which I had poured out for him. ⁴“The facts appear to admit of only one explanation.”

⁵“What! you have solved it already?”

⁶“Well, that would be too much to say. ⁷I have discovered a suggestive fact, that is all. ⁸It is, however, very suggestive. ⁹The details are still to be added. ¹⁰I have just found, on consulting the back files of the Times, that Major Sholto, of Upper Norwood, late of the 34th Bombay Infantry, died upon the 28th of April, 1882.”

¹¹“I may be very obtuse, Holmes, but I fail to see what this suggests.”

¹²“No? You surprise me. ¹³Look at it in this way, then. ¹⁴Captain Morstan disappears. ¹⁵The only person in London whom he could have visited is Major Sholto. ¹⁶Major Sholto denies having heard that he was in London. ¹⁷Four years later Sholto dies. ¹⁸Within a week of his death Captain Morstan's daughter receives a valuable present, which is repeated from year to year, and now culminates in a letter which describes her as a wronged woman. ¹⁹What wrong can it refer to except this deprivation of her father? ²⁰And why should the presents begin immediately after Sholto's death, unless it is that Sholto's heir knows something of the mystery and desires to make compensation? ²¹Have you any alternative theory which will meet the facts?”

²²“But what a strange compensation! ²³And how strangely made! ²⁴Why, too, should he write a letter now, rather than six years ago? ²⁵Again, the letter speaks of giving her justice. ²⁶What justice can she have? ²⁷It is too much to suppose that her father is still alive. ²⁸There is no other injustice in her case that you know of.”

²⁹“There are difficulties; there are certainly difficulties,” said Sherlock Holmes, pensively. ³⁰“But our expedition of to-night will solve them all. ³¹Ah, here is a four-wheeler, and Miss Morstan is inside. ³²Are you all ready? ³³Then we had better go down, for it is a little past the hour.”

³⁴I picked up my hat and my heaviest stick, but I observed that Holmes took his revolver from his drawer and slipped it into his pocket. ³⁵It was clear that he thought that our night's work might be a serious one.

³⁶Miss Morstan was muffled in a dark cloak, and her sensitive face was composed, but pale. ³⁷She must have been more than woman if she did not feel some uneasiness at the strange enterprise upon which we were embarking, yet her self-control was perfect, and she readily answered the few additional questions which Sherlock Holmes put to her.

³⁸“Major Sholto was a very particular friend of papa's,” she said. ³⁹“His letters were full of allusions to the major. ⁴⁰He and papa were in command of the troops at the Andaman Islands, so they were thrown a great deal together. ⁴¹By the way, a curious paper was found in papa's desk which no one could understand. ⁴²I don't suppose that it is of the slightest importance, but I thought you might care to see it, so I brought it with me. ⁴³It is here.”

⁴⁴Holmes unfolded the paper carefully and smoothed it out upon his knee. ⁴⁵He then very methodically examined it all over with his double lens.

⁴⁶“It is paper of native Indian manufacture,” he remarked. ⁴⁷“It has at some time been pinned to a board. ⁴⁸The diagram upon it appears to be a plan of part of a large building with numerous halls, corridors, and passages. ⁴⁹At one point is a small cross done in red ink, and above it is ‘3.37 from left,’ in faded pencil-writing. ⁵⁰In the left-hand corner is a curious hieroglyphic like four crosses in a line with their arms touching. ⁵¹Beside it is written, in very rough and coarse characters, ‘The sign of the four,—Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar.’ ⁵²No, I confess that I do not see how this bears upon the matter. ⁵³Yet it is evidently a document of importance. ⁵⁴It has been kept carefully in a pocket-book; for the one side is as clean as the other.”

⁵⁵“It was in his pocket-book that we found it.”

⁵⁶“Preserve it carefully, then, Miss Morstan, for it may prove to be of use to us. ⁵⁷I begin to suspect that this matter may turn out to be much deeper and more subtle than I at first supposed. ⁵⁸I must reconsider my ideas.” ⁵⁹He leaned back in the cab, and I could see by his drawn brow and his vacant eye that he was thinking intently. ⁶⁰Miss Morstan and I chatted in an undertone about our present expedition and its possible outcome, but our companion maintained his impenetrable reserve until the end of our journey.

⁶¹It was a September evening, and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. ⁶²Mud-colored clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. ⁶³Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. ⁶⁴The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. ⁶⁵There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light,—sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. ⁶⁶Like all human kind, they flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once more. ⁶⁷I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed. ⁶⁸I could see from Miss Morstan's manner that she was suffering from the same feeling. ⁶⁹Holmes alone could rise superior to petty influences. ⁷⁰He held his open note-book upon his knee, and from time to time he jotted down figures and memoranda in the light of his pocket-lantern.

⁷¹At the Lyceum Theatre the crowds were already thick at the side-entrances. ⁷²In front a continuous stream of hansoms and four-wheelers were rattling up, discharging their cargoes of shirt-fronted men and beshawled, bediamonded women. ⁷³We had hardly reached the third pillar, which was our rendezvous, before a small, dark, brisk man in the dress of a coachman accosted us.

⁷⁴“Are you the parties who come with Miss Morstan?” he asked.

⁷⁵“I am Miss Morstan, and these two gentlemen are my friends,” said she.

⁷⁶He bent a pair of wonderfully penetrating and questioning eyes upon us. ⁷⁷“You will excuse me, miss,” he said with a certain dogged manner, “but I was to ask you to give me your word that neither of your companions is a police-officer.”

⁷⁸“I give you my word on that,” she answered.

⁷⁹He gave a shrill whistle, on which a street Arab led across a four-wheeler and opened the door. ⁸⁰The man who had addressed us mounted to the box, while we took our places inside. ⁸¹We had hardly done so before the driver whipped up his horse, and we plunged away at a furious pace through the foggy streets.

⁸²The situation was a curious one. ⁸³We were driving to an unknown place, on an unknown errand. ⁸⁴Yet our invitation was either a complete hoax,—which was an inconceivable hypothesis,—or else we had good reason to think that important issues might hang upon our journey. ⁸⁵Miss Morstan's demeanor was as resolute and collected as ever. ⁸⁶I endeavored to cheer and amuse her by reminiscences of my

adventures in Afghanistan; but, to tell the truth, I was myself so excited at our situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were slightly involved. ⁸⁷To this day she declares that I told her one moving anecdote as to how a musket looked into my tent at the dead of night, and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it. ⁸⁸At first I had some idea as to the direction in which we were driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings, and knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long way. ⁸⁹Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and he muttered the names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous by-streets.

⁹⁰“Rochester Row,” said he. ⁹¹“Now Vincent Square. ⁹²Now we come out on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. ⁹³We are making for the Surrey side, apparently. ⁹⁴Yes, I thought so. ⁹⁵Now we are on the bridge. ⁹⁶You can catch glimpses of the river.”

⁹⁷We did indeed bet a fleeting view of a stretch of the Thames with the lamps shining upon the broad, silent water; but our cab dashed on, and was soon involved in a labyrinth of streets upon the other side.

⁹⁸“Wordsworth Road,” said my companion. ⁹⁹“Priory Road. ¹⁰⁰Lark Hall Lane. ¹⁰¹Stockwell Place. ¹⁰²Robert Street. ¹⁰³Cold Harbor Lane. ¹⁰⁴Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions.”

¹⁰⁵We had, indeed, reached a questionable and forbidding neighborhood. ¹⁰⁶Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare and tawdry brilliancy of public houses at the corner. ¹⁰⁷Then came rows of two-storied villas each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then again interminable lines of new staring brick buildings,—the monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country. ¹⁰⁸At last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace. ¹⁰⁹None of the other houses were inhabited, and that at which we stopped was as dark as its neighbors, save for a single glimmer in the kitchen window. ¹¹⁰On our knocking, however, the door was instantly thrown open by a Hindoo servant clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a yellow sash. ¹¹¹There was something strangely incongruous in this Oriental figure framed in the commonplace door-way of a third-rate suburban dwelling-house.

¹¹²“The Sahib awaits you,” said he, and even as he spoke there came a high piping voice from some inner room. ¹¹³“Show them in to me, khitmutgar,” it cried. ¹¹⁴“Show them straight in to me.”

Chapter IV.

The Story of the Bald-Headed Man

¹We followed the Indian down a sordid and common passage, ill lit and worse furnished, until he came to a door upon the right, which he threw open. ²A blaze of yellow light streamed out upon us, and in the centre of the glare there stood a small man with a very high head, a bristle of red hair all round the fringe of it, and a bald, shining scalp which shot out from among it like a mountain-peak from fir-trees. ³He writhed his hands together as he stood, and his features were in a perpetual jerk, now smiling, now scowling, but never for an instant in repose. ⁴Nature had given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow and irregular teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly passing his hand over the lower part of his face. ⁵In spite of his obtrusive baldness, he gave the impression of youth. ⁶In point of fact he had just turned his thirtieth year.

⁷“Your servant, Miss Morstan,” he kept repeating, in a thin, high voice. ⁸“Your servant, gentlemen. ⁹Pray step into my little sanctum. ¹⁰A small place, miss, but furnished to my own liking. ¹¹An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London.”

¹²We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he invited us. ¹³In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond of the first water in a setting of brass. ¹⁴The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase. ¹⁵The carpet was of amber-and-black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. ¹⁶Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. ¹⁷A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. ¹⁸As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odor.

¹⁹“Mr. Thaddeus Sholto,” said the little man, still jerking and smiling. ²⁰“That is my name. ²¹You are Miss Morstan, of course. ²²And these gentlemen—”

²³“This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and this is Dr. Watson.”

²⁴“A doctor, eh?” cried he, much excited. ²⁵“Have you your stethoscope? ²⁶Might I ask you—would you have the kindness? ²⁷I have grave doubts as to my mitral valve, if you would be so very good. ²⁸The aortic I may rely upon, but I should value your opinion upon the mitral.”

²⁹I listened to his heart, as requested, but was unable to find anything amiss, save indeed that he was in an ecstasy of fear, for he shivered from head to foot. ³⁰“It appears to be normal,” I said. ³¹“You have no cause for uneasiness.”

³²“You will excuse my anxiety, Miss Morstan,” he remarked, airily. ³³“I am a great sufferer, and I have long had suspicions as to that valve. ³⁴I am delighted to hear that they are unwarranted. ³⁵Had your father, Miss Morstan, refrained from throwing a strain upon his heart, he might have been alive now.”

³⁶I could have struck the man across the face, so hot was I at this callous and off-hand reference to so delicate a matter. ³⁷Miss Morstan sat down, and her face grew white to the lips. ³⁸“I knew in my heart that he was dead,” said she.

³⁹“I can give you every information,” said he, “and, what is more, I can do you justice; and I will, too, whatever Brother Bartholomew may say. ⁴⁰I am so glad to have your friends here, not only as an escort to you, but also as witnesses to what I am about to do and say. ⁴¹The three of us can show a bold front to Brother Bartholomew. ⁴²But let us have no outsiders,—no police or officials. ⁴³We can settle everything satisfactorily among ourselves, without any interference. ⁴⁴Nothing would annoy Brother

Bartholomew more than any publicity.”⁴⁵ He sat down upon a low settee and blinked at us inquiringly with his weak, watery blue eyes.

⁴⁶“For my part,” said Holmes, “whatever you may choose to say will go no further.”

⁴⁷I nodded to show my agreement.

⁴⁸“That is well! ⁴⁹That is well!” said he. ⁵⁰“May I offer you a glass of Chianti, Miss Morstan? ⁵¹Or of Tokay? ⁵²I keep no other wines. ⁵³Shall I open a flask? ⁵⁴No? ⁵⁵Well, then, I trust that you have no objection to tobacco-smoke, to the mild balsamic odor of the Eastern tobacco. ⁵⁶I am a little nervous, and I find my hookah an invaluable sedative.” ⁵⁷He applied a taper to the great bowl, and the smoke bubbled merrily through the rose-water. ⁵⁸We sat all three in a semicircle, with our heads advanced, and our chins upon our hands, while the strange, jerky little fellow, with his high, shining head, puffed uneasily in the centre.

⁵⁹“When I first determined to make this communication to you,” said he, “I might have given you my address, but I feared that you might disregard my request and bring unpleasant people with you. ⁶⁰I took the liberty, therefore, of making an appointment in such a way that my man Williams might be able to see you first. ⁶¹I have complete confidence in his discretion, and he had orders, if he were dissatisfied, to proceed no further in the matter. ⁶²You will excuse these precautions, but I am a man of somewhat retiring, and I might even say refined, tastes, and there is nothing more unaesthetic than a policeman. ⁶³I have a natural shrinking from all forms of rough materialism. ⁶⁴I seldom come in contact with the rough crowd. ⁶⁵I live, as you see, with some little atmosphere of elegance around me. ⁶⁶I may call myself a patron of the arts. ⁶⁷It is my weakness. ⁶⁸The landscape is a genuine Corot, and, though a connoisseur might perhaps throw a doubt upon that Salvator Rosa, there cannot be the least question about the Bouguereau. ⁶⁹I am partial to the modern French school.”

⁷⁰“You will excuse me, Mr. Sholto,” said Miss Morstan, “but I am here at your request to learn something which you desire to tell me. ⁷¹It is very late, and I should desire the interview to be as short as possible.”

⁷²“At the best it must take some time,” he answered; “for we shall certainly have to go to Norwood and see Brother Bartholomew. ⁷³We shall all go and try if we can get the better of Brother Bartholomew. ⁷⁴He is very angry with me for taking the course which has seemed right to me. ⁷⁵I had quite high words with him last night. ⁷⁶You cannot imagine what a terrible fellow he is when he is angry.”

⁷⁷“If we are to go to Norwood it would perhaps be as well to start at once,” I ventured to remark.

⁷⁸He laughed until his ears were quite red. ⁷⁹“That would hardly do,” he cried. ⁸⁰“I don't know what he would say if I brought you in that sudden way. ⁸¹No, I must prepare you by showing you how we all stand to each other. ⁸²In the first place, I must tell you that there are several points in the story of which I am myself ignorant. ⁸³I can only lay the facts before you as far as I know them myself.

⁸⁴“My father was, as you may have guessed, Major John Sholto, once of the Indian army. ⁸⁵He retired some eleven years ago, and came to live at Pondicherry Lodge in Upper Norwood. ⁸⁶He had prospered in India, and brought back with him a considerable sum of money, a large collection of valuable curiosities, and a staff of native servants. ⁸⁷With these advantages he bought himself a house, and lived in great luxury. ⁸⁸My twin-brother Bartholomew and I were the only children.

⁸⁹“I very well remember the sensation which was caused by the disappearance of Captain Morstan. ⁹⁰We read the details in the papers, and, knowing that he had been a friend of our father's, we discussed the case freely in his presence. ⁹¹He used to join in our speculations as to what could have happened. ⁹²Never for an instant did we suspect that he had the whole secret hidden in his own breast,—that of all men he alone knew the fate of Arthur Morstan.

⁹³“We did know, however, that some mystery—some positive danger—overhung our father. ⁹⁴He was very fearful of going out alone, and he always employed two prize-fighters to act as porters at Pondicherry Lodge. Williams, who drove you to-night, was one of them. ⁹⁵He was once light-weight champion of England. ⁹⁶Our father would never tell us what it was he feared, but he had a most marked aversion to men with wooden legs. ⁹⁷On one occasion he actually fired his revolver at a wooden-legged man, who proved to be a harmless tradesman canvassing for orders. ⁹⁸We had to pay a large sum to hush the matter up. ⁹⁹My brother and I used to think this a mere whim of my father's, but events have since led us to change our opinion.

¹⁰⁰“Early in 1882 my father received a letter from India which was a great shock to him. ¹⁰¹He nearly fainted at the breakfast-table when he opened it, and from that day he sickened to his death. ¹⁰²What was in the letter we could never discover, but I could see as he held it that it was short and written in a scrawling hand. ¹⁰³He had suffered for years from an enlarged spleen, but he now became rapidly worse, and towards the end of April we were informed that he was beyond all hope, and that he wished to make a last communication to us.

¹⁰⁴“When we entered his room he was propped up with pillows and breathing heavily. ¹⁰⁵He besought us to lock the door and to come upon either side of the bed. ¹⁰⁶Then, grasping our hands, he made a remarkable statement to us, in a voice which was broken as much by emotion as by pain. ¹⁰⁷I shall try and give it to you in his own very words.

¹⁰⁸“‘I have only one thing,’ he said, ‘which weighs upon my mind at this supreme moment. ¹⁰⁹It is my treatment of poor Morstan's orphan. ¹¹⁰The cursed greed which has been my besetting sin through life has withheld from her the treasure, half at least of which should have been hers. ¹¹¹And yet I have made no use of it myself,—so blind and foolish a thing is avarice. ¹¹²The mere feeling of possession has been so dear to me that I could not bear to share it with another. ¹¹³See that chaplet dipped with pearls beside the quinine-bottle. ¹¹⁴Even that I could not bear to part with, although I had got it out with the design of sending it to her. ¹¹⁵You, my sons, will give her a fair share of the Agra treasure. ¹¹⁶But send her nothing—not even the chaplet—until I am gone. ¹¹⁷After all, men have been as bad as this and have recovered.

¹¹⁸“‘I will tell you how Morstan died,’ he continued. ¹¹⁹‘He had suffered for years from a weak heart, but he concealed it from every one. ¹²⁰I alone knew it. ¹²¹When in India, he and I, through a remarkable chain of circumstances, came into possession of a considerable treasure. ¹²²I brought it over to England, and on the night of Morstan's arrival he came straight over here to claim his share. ¹²³He walked over from the station, and was admitted by my faithful Lal Chowdar, who is now dead. ¹²⁴Morstan and I had a difference of opinion as to the division of the treasure, and we came to heated words. ¹²⁵Morstan had sprung out of his chair in a paroxysm of anger, when he suddenly pressed his hand to his side, his face turned a dusky hue, and he fell backwards, cutting his head against the corner of the treasure-chest. ¹²⁶When I stooped over him I found, to my horror, that he was dead.

¹²⁷“‘For a long time I sat half distracted, wondering what I should do. ¹²⁸My first impulse was, of course, to call for assistance; but I could not but recognize that there was every chance that I would be accused of his murder. ¹²⁹His death at the moment of a quarrel, and the gash in his head, would be black against me. ¹³⁰Again, an official inquiry could not be made without bringing out some facts about the treasure, which I was particularly anxious to keep secret. ¹³¹He had told me that no soul upon earth knew where he had gone. ¹³²There seemed to be no necessity why any soul ever should know.

¹³³“‘I was still pondering over the matter, when, looking up, I saw my servant, Lal Chowdar, in the doorway. ¹³⁴He stole in and bolted the door behind him. ¹³⁵“Do not fear, Sahib,” he said. ¹³⁶“No one need know that you have killed him. ¹³⁷Let us hide him away, and who is the wiser?” ¹³⁸“I did not kill him,” said I. ¹³⁹Lal Chowdar shook his head and smiled. ¹⁴⁰“I heard it all, Sahib,” said he. ¹⁴¹“I heard you quarrel, and I heard the blow. ¹⁴²But my lips are sealed. ¹⁴³All are asleep in the house. ¹⁴⁴Let us put

him away together.”¹⁴⁵ That was enough to decide met. ¹⁴⁶If my own servant could not believe my innocence, how could I hope to make it good before twelve foolish tradesmen in a jury-box? ¹⁴⁷Lal Chowdar and I disposed of the body that night, and within a few days the London papers were full of the mysterious disappearance of Captain Morstan. ¹⁴⁸You will see from what I say that I can hardly be blamed in the matter. ¹⁴⁹My fault lies in the fact that we concealed not only the body, but also the treasure, and that I have clung to Morstan's share as well as to my own. ¹⁵⁰I wish you, therefore, to make restitution. ¹⁵¹Put your ears down to my mouth. ¹⁵²The treasure is hidden in— ¹⁵³At this instant a horrible change came over his expression; his eyes stared wildly, his jaw dropped, and he yelled, in a voice which I can never forget, ‘Keep him out! ¹⁵⁴For Christ's sake keep him out!’ ¹⁵⁵We both stared round at the window behind us upon which his gaze was fixed. ¹⁵⁶A face was looking in at us out of the darkness. ¹⁵⁷We could see the whitening of the nose where it was pressed against the glass. ¹⁵⁸It was a bearded, hairy face, with wild cruel eyes and an expression of concentrated malevolence. ¹⁵⁹My brother and I rushed towards the window, but the man was gone. ¹⁶⁰When we returned to my father his head had dropped and his pulse had ceased to beat.

¹⁶¹“We searched the garden that night, but found no sign of the intruder, save that just under the window a single footmark was visible in the flower-bed. ¹⁶²But for that one trace, we might have thought that our imaginations had conjured up that wild, fierce face. ¹⁶³We soon, however, had another and a more striking proof that there were secret agencies at work all round us. ¹⁶⁴The window of my father's room was found open in the morning, his cupboards and boxes had been rifled, and upon his chest was fixed a torn piece of paper, with the words ‘The sign of the four’ scrawled across it. ¹⁶⁵What the phrase meant, or who our secret visitor may have been, we never knew. ¹⁶⁶As far as we can judge, none of my father's property had been actually stolen, though everything had been turned out. ¹⁶⁷My brother and I naturally associated this peculiar incident with the fear which haunted my father during his life; but it is still a complete mystery to us.”

¹⁶⁸The little man stopped to relight his hookah and puffed thoughtfully for a few moments. ¹⁶⁹We had all sat absorbed, listening to his extraordinary narrative. ¹⁷⁰At the short account of her father's death Miss Morstan had turned deadly white, and for a moment I feared that she was about to faint. ¹⁷¹She rallied however, on drinking a glass of water which I quietly poured out for her from a Venetian carafe upon the side-table. ¹⁷²Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair with an abstracted expression and the lids drawn low over his glittering eyes. ¹⁷³As I glanced at him I could not but think how on that very day he had complained bitterly of the commonplaceness of life. ¹⁷⁴Here at least was a problem which would tax his sagacity to the utmost. ¹⁷⁵Mr. Thaddeus Sholto looked from one to the other of us with an obvious pride at the effect which his story had produced, and then continued between the puffs of his overgrown pipe.

¹⁷⁶“My brother and I,” said he, “were, as you may imagine, much excited as to the treasure which my father had spoken of. ¹⁷⁷For weeks and for months we dug and delved in every part of the garden, without discovering its whereabouts. ¹⁷⁸It was maddening to think that the hiding-place was on his very lips at the moment that he died. ¹⁷⁹We could judge the splendor of the missing riches by the chaplet which he had taken out. ¹⁸⁰Over this chaplet my brother Bartholomew and I had some little discussion. ¹⁸¹The pearls were evidently of great value, and he was averse to part with them, for, between friends, my brother was himself a little inclined to my father's fault. ¹⁸²He thought, too, that if we parted with the chaplet it might give rise to gossip and finally bring us into trouble. ¹⁸³It was all that I could do to persuade him to let me find out Miss Morstan's address and send her a detached pearl at fixed intervals, so that at least she might never feel destitute.”

¹⁸⁴“It was a kindly thought,” said our companion, earnestly. ¹⁸⁵“It was extremely good of you.”

¹⁸⁶The little man waved his hand deprecatingly. ¹⁸⁷“We were your trustees,” he said. ¹⁸⁸“That was the view which I took of it, though Brother Bartholomew could not altogether see it in that light. ¹⁸⁹We had plenty of money ourselves. ¹⁹⁰I desired no more. ¹⁹¹Besides, it would have been such bad taste to have

treated a young lady in so scurvy a fashion. ¹⁹²‘Le mauvais goût mène au crime.’ ¹⁹³The French have a very neat way of putting these things. ¹⁹⁴Our difference of opinion on this subject went so far that I thought it best to set up rooms for myself: so I left Pondicherry Lodge, taking the old khitmutgar and Williams with me. ¹⁹⁵Yesterday, however, I learn that an event of extreme importance has occurred. ¹⁹⁶The treasure has been discovered. ¹⁹⁷I instantly communicated with Miss Morstan, and it only remains for us to drive out to Norwood and demand our share. ¹⁹⁸I explained my views last night to Brother Bartholomew: so we shall be expected, if not welcome, visitors.”

¹⁹⁹Mr. Thaddeus Sholto ceased, and sat twitching on his luxurious settee. ²⁰⁰We all remained silent, with our thoughts upon the new development which the mysterious business had taken. ²⁰¹Holmes was the first to spring to his feet.

²⁰²“You have done well, sir, from first to last,” said he. ²⁰³“It is possible that we may be able to make you some small return by throwing some light upon that which is still dark to you. ²⁰⁴But, as Miss Morstan remarked just now, it is late, and we had best put the matter through without delay.”

²⁰⁵Our new acquaintance very deliberately coiled up the tube of his hookah, and produced from behind a curtain a very long befrogged topcoat with Astrakhan collar and cuffs. ²⁰⁶This he buttoned tightly up, in spite of the extreme closeness of the night, and finished his attire by putting on a rabbit-skin cap with hanging lappets which covered the ears, so that no part of him was visible save his mobile and peaky face. ²⁰⁷“My health is somewhat fragile,” he remarked, as he led the way down the passage. ²⁰⁸“I am compelled to be a valetudinarian.”

²⁰⁹Our cab was awaiting us outside, and our programme was evidently prearranged, for the driver started off at once at a rapid pace. ²¹⁰Thaddeus Sholto talked incessantly, in a voice which rose high above the rattle of the wheels.

²¹¹“Bartholomew is a clever fellow,” said he. ²¹²“How do you think he found out where the treasure was? ²¹³He had come to the conclusion that it was somewhere indoors: so he worked out all the cubic space of the house, and made measurements everywhere, so that not one inch should be unaccounted for. ²¹⁴Among other things, he found that the height of the building was seventy-four feet, but on adding together the heights of all the separate rooms, and making every allowance for the space between, which he ascertained by borings, he could not bring the total to more than seventy feet. ²¹⁵There were four feet unaccounted for. ²¹⁶These could only be at the top of the building. ²¹⁷He knocked a hole, therefore, in the lath-and-plaster ceiling of the highest room, and there, sure enough, he came upon another little garret above it, which had been sealed up and was known to no one. ²¹⁸In the centre stood the treasure-chest, resting upon two rafters. ²¹⁹He lowered it through the hole, and there it lies. ²²⁰He computes the value of the jewels at not less than half a million sterling.”

²²¹At the mention of this gigantic sum we all stared at one another open-eyed. ²²²Miss Morstan, could we secure her rights, would change from a needy governess to the richest heiress in England. ²²³Surely it was the place of a loyal friend to rejoice at such news; yet I am ashamed to say that selfishness took me by the soul, and that my heart turned as heavy as lead within me. ²²⁴I stammered out some few halting words of congratulation, and then sat downcast, with my head drooped, deaf to the babble of our new acquaintance. ²²⁵He was clearly a confirmed hypochondriac, and I was dreamily conscious that he was pouring forth interminable trains of symptoms, and imploring information as to the composition and action of innumerable quack nostrums, some of which he bore about in a leather case in his pocket. ²²⁶I trust that he may not remember any of the answers which I gave him that night. ²²⁷Holmes declares that he overheard me caution him against the great danger of taking more than two drops of castor oil, while I recommended strychnine in large doses as a sedative. ²²⁸However that may be, I was certainly relieved when our cab pulled up with a jerk and the coachman sprang down to open the door.

²²⁹“This, Miss Morstan, is Pondicherry Lodge,” said Mr. Thaddeus Sholto, as he handed her out.

Chapter V.

The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge

²³⁰It was nearly eleven o'clock when we reached this final stage of our night's adventures. ²³¹We had left the damp fog of the great city behind us, and the night was fairly fine. ²³²A warm wind blew from the westward, and heavy clouds moved slowly across the sky, with half a moon peeping occasionally through the rifts. ²³³It was clear enough to see for some distance, but Thaddeus Sholto took down one of the side-lamps from the carriage to give us a better light upon our way.

²³⁴Pondicherry Lodge stood in its own grounds, and was girt round with a very high stone wall topped with broken glass. ²³⁵A single narrow iron-clamped door formed the only means of entrance. ²³⁶On this our guide knocked with a peculiar postman-like rat-tat.

²³⁷"Who is there?" cried a gruff voice from within.

²³⁸"It is I, McMurdo. ²³⁹You surely know my knock by this time."

²⁴⁰There was a grumbling sound and a clanking and jarring of keys. ²⁴¹The door swung heavily back, and a short, deep-chested man stood in the opening, with the yellow light of the lantern shining upon his protruded face and twinkling distrustful eyes.

²⁴²"That you, Mr. Thaddeus? ²⁴³But who are the others? ²⁴⁴I had no orders about them from the master."

²⁴⁵"No, McMurdo? ²⁴⁶You surprise me! ²⁴⁷I told my brother last night that I should bring some friends.

²⁴⁸"He ain't been out o' his room to-day, Mr. Thaddeus, and I have no orders. ²⁴⁹You know very well that I must stick to regulations. ²⁵⁰I can let you in, but your friends must just stop where they are."

²⁵¹This was an unexpected obstacle. ²⁵²Thaddeus Sholto looked about him in a perplexed and helpless manner. ²⁵³"This is too bad of you, McMurdo!" he said. ²⁵⁴"If I guarantee them, that is enough for you. ²⁵⁵There is the young lady, too. ²⁵⁶She cannot wait on the public road at this hour."

²⁵⁷"Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus," said the porter, inexorably. ²⁵⁸"Folk may be friends o' yours, and yet no friends o' the master's. ²⁵⁹He pays me well to do my duty, and my duty I'll do. ²⁶⁰I don't know none o' your friends."

²⁶¹"Oh, yes you do, McMurdo," cried Sherlock Holmes, genially. ²⁶²"I don't think you can have forgotten me. ²⁶³Don't you remember the amateur who fought three rounds with you at Alison's rooms on the night of your benefit four years back?"

²⁶⁴"Not Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" roared the prize-fighter. ²⁶⁵"God's truth! how could I have mistook you? ²⁶⁶If instead o' standin' there so quiet you had just stepped up and given me that cross-hit of yours under the jaw, I'd ha' known you without a question. ²⁶⁷Ah, you're one that has wasted your gifts, you have! ²⁶⁸You might have aimed high, if you had joined the fancy."

²⁶⁹"You see, Watson, if all else fails me I have still one of the scientific professions open to me," said Holmes, laughing. ²⁷⁰"Our friend won't keep us out in the cold now, I am sure."

²⁷¹"In you come, sir, in you come,—you and your friends," he answered. ²⁷²"Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus, but orders are very strict. ²⁷³Had to be certain of your friends before I let them in."

²⁷⁴Inside, a gravel path wound through desolate grounds to a huge clump of a house, square and prosaic, all plunged in shadow save where a moonbeam struck one corner and glimmered in a garret window.

²⁷⁵The vast size of the building, with its gloom and its deathly silence, struck a chill to the heart. ²⁷⁶Even Thaddeus Sholto seemed ill at ease, and the lantern quivered and rattled in his hand.

²⁷⁷"I cannot understand it," he said. ²⁷⁸"There must be some mistake. ²⁷⁹I distinctly told Bartholomew that we should be here, and yet there is no light in his window. ²⁸⁰I do not know what to make of it."

²⁸¹"Does he always guard the premises in this way?" asked Holmes.

²⁸²"Yes; he has followed my father's custom. ²⁸³He was the favorite son, you know, and I sometimes think that my father may have told him more than he ever told me. ²⁸⁴That is Bartholomew's window up there where the moonshine strikes. ²⁸⁵It is quite bright, but there is no light from within, I think."

²⁸⁶"None," said Holmes. ²⁸⁷"But I see the glint of a light in that little window beside the door."

²⁸⁸"Ah, that is the housekeeper's room. ²⁸⁹That is where old Mrs. Bernstone sits. ²⁹⁰She can tell us all about it. ²⁹¹But perhaps you would not mind waiting here for a minute or two, for if we all go in together and she has no word of our coming she may be alarmed. ²⁹²But hush! what is that?"

²⁹³He held up the lantern, and his hand shook until the circles of light flickered and wavered all round us. ²⁹⁴Miss Morstan seized my wrist, and we all stood with thumping hearts, straining our ears. ²⁹⁵From the great black house there sounded through the silent night the saddest and most pitiful of sounds,—the shrill, broken whimpering of a frightened woman.

²⁹⁶"It is Mrs. Bernstone," said Sholto. ²⁹⁷"She is the only woman in the house. ²⁹⁸Wait here. ²⁹⁹I shall be back in a moment." ³⁰⁰He hurried for the door, and knocked in his peculiar way. ³⁰¹We could see a tall old woman admit him, and sway with pleasure at the very sight of him.

³⁰²"Oh, Mr. Thaddeus, sir, I am so glad you have come! ³⁰³I am so glad you have come, Mr. Thaddeus, sir!" ³⁰⁴We heard her reiterated rejoicings until the door was closed and her voice died away into a muffled monotone.

³⁰⁵Our guide had left us the lantern. ³⁰⁶Holmes swung it slowly round, and peered keenly at the house, and at the great rubbish-heaps which cumbered the grounds. ³⁰⁷Miss Morstan and I stood together, and her hand was in mine. ³⁰⁸A wondrous subtle thing is love, for here were we two who had never seen each other before that day, between whom no word or even look of affection had ever passed, and yet now in an hour of trouble our hands instinctively sought for each other. ³⁰⁹I have marvelled at it since, but at the time it seemed the most natural thing that I should go out to her so, and, as she has often told me, there was in her also the instinct to turn to me for comfort and protection. ³¹⁰So we stood hand in hand, like two children, and there was peace in our hearts for all the dark things that surrounded us.

³¹¹"What a strange place!" she said, looking round.

³¹²"It looks as though all the moles in England had been let loose in it. ³¹³I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work."

³¹⁴"And from the same cause," said Holmes. ³¹⁵"These are the traces of the treasure-seekers. ³¹⁶You must remember that they were six years looking for it. ³¹⁷No wonder that the grounds look like a gravel-pit."

³¹⁸At that moment the door of the house burst open, and Thaddeus Sholto came running out, with his hands thrown forward and terror in his eyes.

³¹⁹"There is something amiss with Bartholomew!" he cried. ³²⁰"I am frightened! ³²¹My nerves cannot stand it." ³²²He was, indeed, half blubbering with fear, and his twitching feeble face peeping out from the great Astrakhan collar had the helpless appealing expression of a terrified child.

³²³"Come into the house," said Holmes, in his crisp, firm way.

³²⁴“Yes, do!” pleaded Thaddeus Sholto. ³²⁵“I really do not feel equal to giving directions.”

³²⁶We all followed him into the housekeeper's room, which stood upon the left-hand side of the passage.

³²⁷The old woman was pacing up and down with a scared look and restless picking fingers, but the sight of Miss Morstan appeared to have a soothing effect upon her.

³²⁸“God bless your sweet calm face!” she cried, with an hysterical sob. ³²⁹“It does me good to see you.

³³⁰Oh, but I have been sorely tried this day!”

³³¹Our companion patted her thin, work-worn hand, and murmured some few words of kindly womanly comfort which brought the color back into the others bloodless cheeks.

³³²“Master has locked himself in and will now answer me,” she explained. ³³³“All day I have waited to hear from him, for he often likes to be alone; but an hour ago I feared that something was amiss, so I went up and peeped through the key-hole. ³³⁴You must go up, Mr. Thaddeus,—you must go up and look for yourself. ³³⁵I have seen Mr. Bartholomew Sholto in joy and in sorrow for ten long years, but I never saw him with such a face on him as that.”

³³⁶Sherlock Holmes took the lamp and led the way, for Thaddeus Sholto's teeth were chattering in his head. ³³⁷So shaken was he that I had to pass my hand under his arm as we went up the stairs, for his knees were trembling under him. ³³⁸Twice as we ascended Holmes whipped his lens out of his pocket and carefully examined marks which appeared to me to be mere shapeless smudges of dust upon the cocoa-nut matting which served as a stair-carpet. ³³⁹He walked slowly from step to step, holding the lamp, and shooting keen glances to right and left. ³⁴⁰Miss Morstan had remained behind with the frightened housekeeper.

³⁴¹The third flight of stairs ended in a straight passage of some length, with a great picture in Indian tapestry upon the right of it and three doors upon the left. ³⁴²Holmes advanced along it in the same slow and methodical way, while we kept close at his heels, with our long black shadows streaming backwards down the corridor. ³⁴³The third door was that which we were seeking. ³⁴⁴Holmes knocked without receiving any answer, and then tried to turn the handle and force it open. ³⁴⁵It was locked on the inside, however, and by a broad and powerful bolt, as we could see when we set our lamp up against it. ³⁴⁶The key being turned, however, the hole was not entirely closed. ³⁴⁷Sherlock Holmes bent down to it, and instantly rose again with a sharp intaking of the breath.

³⁴⁸“There is something devilish in this, Watson,” said he, more moved than I had ever before seen him.

³⁴⁹“What do you make of it?”

³⁵⁰I stooped to the hole, and recoiled in horror. ³⁵¹Moonlight was streaming into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shifty radiance. ³⁵²Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, in the air, for all beneath was in shadow, there hung a face,—the very face of our companion Thaddeus. ³⁵³There was the same high, shining head, the same circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. ³⁵⁴The features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. ³⁵⁵So like was the face to that of our little friend that I looked round at him to make sure that he was indeed with us. ³⁵⁶Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us that his brother and he were twins.

³⁵⁷“This is terrible!” I said to Holmes. ³⁵⁸“What is to be done?”

³⁵⁹“The door must come down,” he answered, and, springing against it, he put all his weight upon the lock. ³⁶⁰It creaked and groaned, but did not yield. ³⁶¹Together we flung ourselves upon it once more, and this time it gave way with a sudden snap, and we found ourselves within Bartholomew Sholto's chamber.

³⁶²It appeared to have been fitted up as a chemical laboratory. ³⁶³A double line of glass-stoppered bottles was drawn up upon the wall opposite the door, and the table was littered over with Bunsen burners, test-tubes, and retorts. ³⁶⁴In the corners stood carboys of acid in wicker baskets. ³⁶⁵One of these appeared to leak or to have been broken, for a stream of dark-colored liquid had trickled out from it, and the air was heavy with a peculiarly pungent, tar-like odor. ³⁶⁶A set of steps stood at one side of the room, in the midst of a litter of lath and plaster, and above them there was an opening in the ceiling large enough for a man to pass through. ³⁶⁷At the foot of the steps a long coil of rope was thrown carelessly together.

³⁶⁸By the table, in a wooden arm-chair, the master of the house was seated all in a heap, with his head sunk upon his left shoulder, and that ghastly, inscrutable smile upon his face. ³⁶⁹He was stiff and cold, and had clearly been dead many hours. ³⁷⁰It seemed to me that not only his features but all his limbs were twisted and turned in the most fantastic fashion. ³⁷¹By his hand upon the table there lay a peculiar instrument,—a brown, close-grained stick, with a stone head like a hammer, rudely lashed on with coarse twine. ³⁷²Beside it was a torn sheet of note-paper with some words scrawled upon it. ³⁷³Holmes glanced at it, and then handed it to me.

³⁷⁴“You see,” he said, with a significant raising of the eyebrows.

³⁷⁵In the light of the lantern I read, with a thrill of horror, “The sign of the four.”

³⁷⁶“In God's name, what does it all mean?” I asked.

³⁷⁷“It means murder,” said he, stooping over the dead man. ³⁷⁸“Ah, I expected it. ³⁷⁹Look here!” ³⁸⁰He pointed to what looked like a long, dark thorn stuck in the skin just above the ear.

³⁸¹“It looks like a thorn,” said I.

³⁸²“It is a thorn. ³⁸³You may pick it out. ³⁸⁴But be careful, for it is poisoned.”

³⁸⁵I took it up between my finger and thumb. ³⁸⁶It came away from the skin so readily that hardly any mark was left behind. ³⁸⁷One tiny speck of blood showed where the puncture had been.

³⁸⁸“This is all an insoluble mystery to me,” said I. ³⁸⁹“It grows darker instead of clearer.”

³⁹⁰“On the contrary,” he answered, “it clears every instant. ³⁹¹I only require a few missing links to have an entirely connected case.”

³⁹²We had almost forgotten our companion's presence since we entered the chamber. ³⁹³He was still standing in the door-way, the very picture of terror, wringing his hands and moaning to himself. ³⁹⁴Suddenly, however, he broke out into a sharp, querulous cry.

³⁹⁵“The treasure is gone!” he said. ³⁹⁶“They have robbed him of the treasure! ³⁹⁷There is the hole through which we lowered it. ³⁹⁸I helped him to do it! ³⁹⁹I was the last person who saw him! ⁴⁰⁰I left him here last night, and I heard him lock the door as I came down-stairs.”

⁴⁰⁰“What time was that?”

⁴⁰¹“It was ten o'clock. ⁴⁰²And now he is dead, and the police will be called in, and I shall be suspected of having had a hand in it. ⁴⁰³Oh, yes, I am sure I shall. ⁴⁰⁴But you don't think so, gentlemen? ⁴⁰⁵Surely you don't think that it was I? ⁴⁰⁶Is it likely that I would have brought you here if it were I? ⁴⁰⁷Oh, dear! oh, dear! ⁴⁰⁸I know that I shall go mad!” ⁴⁰⁹He jerked his arms and stamped his feet in a kind of convulsive frenzy.

⁴¹⁰“You have no reason for fear, Mr. Sholto,” said Holmes, kindly, putting his hand upon his shoulder.

⁴¹¹“Take my advice, and drive down to the station to report this matter to the police. ⁴¹²Offer to assist them in every way. ⁴¹³We shall wait here until your return.”

⁴¹⁴The little man obeyed in a half-stupefied fashion, and we heard him stumbling down the stairs in the dark.

Chapter VI.

Sherlock Holmes Gives a Demonstration

¹“Now, Watson,” said Holmes, rubbing his hands, “we have half an hour to ourselves. ²Let us make good use of it. ³My case is, as I have told you, almost complete; but we must not err on the side of over-confidence. ⁴Simple as the case seems now, there may be something deeper underlying it.”

⁵“Simple!” I ejaculated.

⁶“Surely,” said he, with something of the air of a clinical professor expounding to his class. ⁷“Just sit in the corner there, that your footprints may not complicate matters. ⁸Now to work! ⁹In the first place, how did these folk come, and how did they go? ¹⁰The door has not been opened since last night. ¹¹How of the window?” ¹²He carried the lamp across to it, muttering his observations aloud the while, but addressing them to himself rather than to me. ¹³“Window is snibbed on the inner side. ¹⁴Framework is solid. ¹⁵No hinges at the side. ¹⁶Let us open it. ¹⁷No water-pipe near. ¹⁸Roof quite out of reach. ¹⁹Yet a man has mounted by the window. ²⁰It rained a little last night. ²¹Here is the print of a foot in mould upon the sill. ²²And here is a circular muddy mark, and here again upon the floor, and here again by the table. ²³See here, Watson! ²⁴This is really a very pretty demonstration.”

²⁵I looked at the round, well-defined muddy discs. ²⁶“This is not a footmark,” said I.

²⁷“It is something much more valuable to us. ²⁸It is the impression of a wooden stump. ²⁹You see here on the sill is the boot-mark, a heavy boot with the broad metal heel, and beside it is the mark of the timber-toe.”

³⁰“It is the wooden-legged man.”

³¹“Quite so. ³²But there has been some one else,—a very able and efficient ally. ³³Could you scale that wall, doctor?”

³⁴I looked out of the open window. ³⁵The moon still shone brightly on that angle of the house. ³⁶We were a good sixty feet from the ground, and, look where I would, I could see no foothold, nor as much as a crevice in the brick-work.

³⁷“It is absolutely impossible,” I answered.

³⁸“Without aid it is so. ³⁹But suppose you had a friend up here who lowered you this good stout rope which I see in the corner, securing one end of it to this great hook in the wall. ⁴⁰Then, I think, if you were an active man, you might swarm up, wooden leg and all. ⁴¹You would depart, of course, in the same fashion, and your ally would draw up the rope, untie it from the hook, shut the window, snib it on the inside, and get away in the way that he originally came. ⁴²As a minor point it may be noted,” he continued, fingering the rope, “that our wooden-legged friend, though a fair climber, was not a professional sailor. ⁴³His hands were far from horny. ⁴⁴My lens discloses more than one blood-mark, especially towards the end of the rope, from which I gather that he slipped down with such velocity that he took the skin off his hand.”

⁴⁵“This is all very well,” said I, “but the thing becomes more unintelligible than ever. ⁴⁶How about this mysterious ally? ⁴⁷How came he into the room?”

⁴⁸“Yes, the ally!” repeated Holmes, pensively. ⁴⁹“There are features of interest about this ally. ⁵⁰He lifts the case from the regions of the commonplace. ⁵¹I fancy that this ally breaks fresh ground in the annals of crime in this country,—though parallel cases suggest themselves from India, and, if my memory serves me, from Senegambia.”

⁵²“How came he, then?” I reiterated. ⁵³“The door is locked, the window is inaccessible. ⁵⁴Was it through the chimney?”

⁵⁵“The grate is much too small,” he answered. ⁵⁶“I had already considered that possibility.”

⁵⁷“How then?” I persisted.

⁵⁸“You will not apply my precept,” he said, shaking his head. ⁵⁹“How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth? ⁶⁰We know that he did not come through the door, the window, or the chimney. ⁶¹We also know that he could not have been concealed in the room, as there is no concealment possible. ⁶²Whence, then, did he come?”

⁶³“He came through the hole in the roof,” I cried.

⁶⁴“Of course he did. ⁶⁵He must have done so. ⁶⁶If you will have the kindness to hold the lamp for me, we shall now extend our researches to the room above,—the secret room in which the treasure was found.”

⁶⁷He mounted the steps, and, seizing a rafter with either hand, he swung himself up into the garret.

⁶⁸Then, lying on his face, he reached down for the lamp and held it while I followed him.

⁶⁹The chamber in which we found ourselves was about ten feet one way and six the other. ⁷⁰The floor was formed by the rafters, with thin lath-and-plaster between, so that in walking one had to step from beam to beam. ⁷¹The roof ran up to an apex, and was evidently the inner shell of the true roof of the house. ⁷²There was no furniture of any sort, and the accumulated dust of years lay thick upon the floor.

⁷³“Here you are, you see,” said Sherlock Holmes, putting his hand against the sloping wall. ⁷⁴“This is a trap-door which leads out on to the roof. ⁷⁵I can press it back, and here is the roof itself, sloping at a gentle angle. ⁷⁶This, then, is the way by which Number One entered. ⁷⁷Let us see if we can find one other traces of his individuality.”

⁷⁸He held down the lamp to the floor, and as he did so I saw for the second time that night a startled, surprised look come over his face. ⁷⁹For myself, as I followed his gaze my skin was cold under my clothes. ⁸⁰The floor was covered thickly with the prints of a naked foot,—clear, well defined, perfectly formed, but scarce half the size of those of an ordinary man.

⁸¹“Holmes,” I said, in a whisper, “a child has done the horrid thing.”

⁸²He had recovered his self-possession in an instant. ⁸³“I was staggered for the moment,” he said, “but the thing is quite natural. ⁸⁴My memory failed me, or I should have been able to foretell it. ⁸⁵There is nothing more to be learned here. ⁸⁶Let us go down.”

⁸⁷“What is your theory, then, as to those footmarks?” I asked, eagerly, when we had regained the lower room once more.

⁸⁸“My dear Watson, try a little analysis yourself,” said he, with a touch of impatience. ⁸⁹“You know my methods. ⁹⁰Apply them, and it will be instructive to compare results.”

⁹¹“I cannot conceive anything which will cover the facts,” I answered.

⁹²“It will be clear enough to you soon,” he said, in an off-hand way. ⁹³“I think that there is nothing else of importance here, but I will look.” ⁹⁴He whipped out his lens and a tape measure, and hurried about the room on his knees, measuring, comparing, examining, with his long thin nose only a few inches from the planks, and his beady eyes gleaming and deep-set like those of a bird. ⁹⁵So swift, silent, and furtive were his movements, like those of a trained blood-hound picking out a scent, that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made had he turned his energy and sagacity against the

law, instead of exerting them in its defense. ⁹⁶As he hunted about, he kept muttering to himself, and finally he broke out into a loud crow of delight.

⁹⁷"We are certainly in luck," said he. ⁹⁸"We ought to have very little trouble now. ⁹⁹Number One has had the misfortune to tread in the creosote. ¹⁰⁰You can see the outline of the edge of his small foot here at the side of this evil-smelling mess. ¹⁰¹The carboy has been cracked, you see, and the stuff has leaked out."

¹⁰²"What then?" I asked.

¹⁰³"Why, we have got him, that's all," said he. ¹⁰⁴"I know a dog that would follow that scent to the world's end. ¹⁰⁵If a pack can track a trailed herring across a shire, how far can a specially-trained hound follow so pungent a smell as this? ¹⁰⁶It sounds like a sum in the rule of three. ¹⁰⁷The answer should give us the— ¹⁰⁸But halloo! here are the accredited representatives of the law."

¹⁰⁹Heavy steps and the clamor of loud voices were audible from below, and the hall door shut with a loud crash.

¹¹⁰"Before they come," said Holmes, "just put your hand here on this poor fellow's arm, and here on his leg. ¹¹¹What do you feel?"

¹¹²"The muscles are as hard as a board," I answered.

¹¹³"Quite so. ¹¹⁴They are in a state of extreme contraction, far exceeding the usual rigor mortis.

¹¹⁵Coupled with this distortion of the face, this Hippocratic smile, or 'risus sardonicus,' as the old writers called it, what conclusion would it suggest to your mind?"

¹¹⁶"Death from some powerful vegetable alkaloid," I answered,—“some strychnine-like substance which would produce tetanus.”

¹¹⁷"That was the idea which occurred to me the instant I saw the drawn muscles of the face. ¹¹⁸On getting into the room I at once looked for the means by which the poison had entered the system. ¹¹⁹As you saw, I discovered a thorn which had been driven or shot with no great force into the scalp. ¹²⁰You observe that the part struck was that which would be turned towards the hole in the ceiling if the man were erect in his chair. ¹²¹Now examine the thorn."

¹²²I took it up gingerly and held it in the light of the lantern. ¹²³It was long, sharp, and black, with a glazed look near the point as though some gummy substance had dried upon it. ¹²⁴The blunt end had been trimmed and rounded off with a knife.

¹²⁵"Is that an English thorn?" he asked.

¹²⁶"No, it certainly is not."

¹²⁷"With all these data you should be able to draw some just inference. ¹²⁸But here are the regulars: so the auxiliary forces may beat a retreat."

¹²⁹As he spoke, the steps which had been coming nearer sounded loudly on the passage, and a very stout, portly man in a gray suit strode heavily into the room. ¹³⁰He was red-faced, burly and plethoric, with a pair of very small twinkling eyes which looked keenly out from between swollen and puffy pouches. ¹³¹He was closely followed by an inspector in uniform, and by the still palpitating Thaddeus Sholto.

¹³²"Here's a business!" he cried, in a muffled, husky voice. ¹³³"Here's a pretty business! ¹³⁴But who are all these? ¹³⁵Why, the house seems to be as full as a rabbit-warren!"

¹³⁶"I think you must recollect me, Mr. Athelney Jones," said Holmes, quietly.

¹³⁷“Why, of course I do!” he wheezed. ¹³⁸“It’s Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the theorist. ¹³⁹Remember you! ¹⁴⁰I’ll never forget how you lectured us all on causes and inferences and effects in the Bishopgate jewel case. ¹⁴¹It’s true you set us on the right track; but you’ll own now that it was more by good luck than good guidance.”

¹⁴²“It was a piece of very simple reasoning.”

¹⁴³“Oh, come, now, come! ¹⁴⁴Never be ashamed to own up. ¹⁴⁵But what is all this? ¹⁴⁶Bad business! ¹⁴⁷Bad business! ¹⁴⁸Stern facts here,—no room for theories. ¹⁴⁹How lucky that I happened to be out at Norwood over another case! ¹⁵⁰I was at the station when the message arrived. ¹⁵¹What d’you think the man died of?”

¹⁵²“Oh, this is hardly a case for me to theorize over,” said Holmes, dryly.

¹⁵³“No, no. ¹⁵⁴Still, we can’t deny that you hit the nail on the head sometimes. ¹⁵⁵Dear me! ¹⁵⁶Door locked, I understand. ¹⁵⁷Jewels worth half a million missing. ¹⁵⁸How was the window?”

¹⁵⁹“Fastened; but there are steps on the sill.”

¹⁶⁰“Well, well, if it was fastened the steps could have nothing to do with the matter. ¹⁶¹That’s common sense. ¹⁶²Man might have died in a fit; but then the jewels are missing. ¹⁶³Ha! ¹⁶⁴I have a theory. ¹⁶⁵These flashes come upon me at times.— ¹⁶⁶Just step outside, sergeant, and you, Mr. Sholto. ¹⁶⁷Your friend can remain.— ¹⁶⁸What do you think of this, Holmes? ¹⁶⁹Sholto was, on his own confession, with his brother last night. ¹⁷⁰The brother died in a fit, on which Sholto walked off with the treasure. ¹⁷¹How’s that?”

¹⁷²“On which the dead man very considerably got up and locked the door on the inside.”

¹⁷³“Hum! ¹⁷⁴There’s a flaw there. ¹⁷⁵Let us apply common sense to the matter. ¹⁷⁶This Thaddeus Sholto was with his brother; there was a quarrel; so much we know. ¹⁷⁷The brother is dead and the jewels are gone. ¹⁷⁸So much also we know. ¹⁷⁹No one saw the brother from the time Thaddeus left him. ¹⁸⁰His bed had not been slept in. ¹⁸¹Thaddeus is evidently in a most disturbed state of mind. ¹⁸²His appearance is—well, not attractive. ¹⁸³You see that I am weaving my web round Thaddeus. ¹⁸⁴The net begins to close upon him.”

¹⁸⁵“You are not quite in possession of the facts yet,” said Holmes. ¹⁸⁶“This splinter of wood, which I have every reason to believe to be poisoned, was in the man’s scalp where you still see the mark; this card, inscribed as you see it, was on the table; and beside it lay this rather curious stone-headed instrument. ¹⁸⁷How does all that fit into your theory?”

¹⁸⁸“Confirms it in every respect,” said the fat detective, pompously. ¹⁸⁹“House is full of Indian curiosities. ¹⁹⁰Thaddeus brought this up, and if this splinter be poisonous Thaddeus may as well have made murderous use of it as any other man. ¹⁹¹The card is some hocus-pocus,—a blind, as like as not. ¹⁹²The only question is, how did he depart? ¹⁹³Ah, of course, here is a hole in the roof.” ¹⁹⁴With great activity, considering his bulk, he sprang up the steps and squeezed through into the garret, and immediately afterwards we heard his exulting voice proclaiming that he had found the trap-door.

¹⁹⁵“He can find something,” remarked Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. ¹⁹⁶“He has occasional glimmerings of reason. ¹⁹⁷Il n’y a pas des sots si incommodes que ceux qui ont de l’esprit!”

¹⁹⁸“You see!” said Athelney Jones, reappearing down the steps again. ¹⁹⁹“Facts are better than mere theories, after all. ²⁰⁰My view of the case is confirmed. ²⁰¹There is a trap-door communicating with the roof, and it is partly open.”

²⁰¹“It was I who opened it.”

²⁰²“Oh, indeed! ²⁰³You did notice it, then?” ²⁰⁴He seemed a little crestfallen at the discovery. ²⁰⁵“Well, whoever noticed it, it shows how our gentleman got away. ²⁰⁶Inspector!”

²⁰⁷“Yes, sir,” from the passage.

²⁰⁸“Ask Mr. Sholto to step this way.— ²⁰⁹Mr. Sholto, it is my duty to inform you that anything which you may say will be used against you. ²¹⁰I arrest you in the Queen's name as being concerned in the death of your brother.”

²¹¹“There, now! ²¹²Didn't I tell you!” cried the poor little man, throwing out his hands, and looking from one to the other of us.

²¹³“Don't trouble yourself about it, Mr. Sholto,” said Holmes. ²¹⁴“I think that I can engage to clear you of the charge.”

²¹⁵“Don't promise too much, Mr. Theorist,—don't promise too much!” snapped the detective. ²¹⁶“You may find it a harder matter than you think.”

²¹⁷“Not only will I clear him, Mr. Jones, but I will make you a free present of the name and description of one of the two people who were in this room last night. ²¹⁸His name, I have every reason to believe, is Jonathan Small. ²¹⁹He is a poorly-educated man, small, active, with his right leg off, and wearing a wooden stump which is worn away upon the inner side. ²²⁰His left boot has a coarse, square-toed sole, with an iron band round the heel. ²²¹He is a middle-aged man, much sunburned, and has been a convict. ²²²These few indications may be of some assistance to you, coupled with the fact that there is a good deal of skin missing from the palm of his hand. ²²³The other man—”

²²⁴“Ah! the other man—?” asked Athelney Jones, in a sneering voice, but impressed none the less, as I could easily see, by the precision of the other's manner.

²²⁵“Is a rather curious person,” said Sherlock Holmes, turning upon his heel. ²²⁶“I hope before very long to be able to introduce you to the pair of them. ²²⁷A word with you, Watson.”

²²⁸He led me out to the head of the stair. ²²⁹“This unexpected occurrence,” he said, “has caused us rather to lose sight of the original purpose of our journey.”

²³⁰“I have just been thinking so,” I answered. ²³¹“It is not right that Miss Morstan should remain in this stricken house.”

²³²“No. ²³³You must escort her home. ²³⁴She lives with Mrs. Cecil Forrester, in Lower Camberwell: so it is not very far. ²³⁵I will wait for you here if you will drive out again. ²³⁶Or perhaps you are too tired?”

²³⁷“By no means. ²³⁸I don't think I could rest until I know more of this fantastic business. ²³⁹I have seen something of the rough side of life, but I give you my word that this quick succession of strange surprises to-night has shaken my nerve completely. ²⁴⁰I should like, however, to see the matter through with you, now that I have got so far.”

²⁴¹“Your presence will be of great service to me,” he answered. ²⁴²“We shall work the case out independently, and leave this fellow Jones to exult over any mare's-nest which he may choose to construct. ²⁴³When you have dropped Miss Morstan I wish you to go on to No. 3 Pinchin Lane, down near the water's edge at Lambeth. ²⁴⁴The third house on the right-hand side is a bird-stuffer's: Sherman is the name. ²⁴⁵You will see a weasel holding a young rabbit in the window. ²⁴⁶Knock old Sherman up, and tell him, with my compliments, that I want Toby at once. ²⁴⁷You will bring Toby back in the cab with you.”

²⁴⁸“A dog, I suppose.”

²⁴⁹“Yes,—a queer mongrel, with a most amazing power of scent. ²⁵⁰I would rather have Toby's help than that of the whole detective force of London.”

²⁵¹“I shall bring him, then,” said I. ²⁵²“It is one now. ²⁵³I ought to be back before three, if I can get a fresh horse.”

²⁵⁴“And I,” said Holmes, “shall see what I can learn from Mrs. Bernstone, and from the Indian servant, who, Mr. Thaddeus tell me, sleeps in the next garret. ²⁵⁵Then I shall study the great Jones's methods and listen to his not too delicate sarcasms. ²⁵⁶‘Wir sind gewohnt, daß die Menschen verhöhnen was sie nicht verstehen.’ ²⁵⁷Goethe is always pithy.”

Chapter VII.

The Episode of the Barrel

¹The police had brought a cab with them, and in this I escorted Miss Morstan back to her home. ²After the angelic fashion of women, she had borne trouble with a calm face as long as there was some one weaker than herself to support, and I had found her bright and placid by the side of the frightened housekeeper. ³In the cab, however, she first turned faint, and then burst into a passion of weeping,—so sorely had she been tried by the adventures of the night. ⁴She has told me since that she thought me cold and distant upon that journey. ⁵She little guessed the struggle within my breast, or the effort of self-restraint which held me back. ⁶My sympathies and my love went out to her, even as my hand had in the garden. ⁷I felt that years of the conventionalities of life could not teach me to know her sweet, brave nature as had this one day of strange experiences. ⁸Yet there were two thoughts which sealed the words of affection upon my lips. ⁹She was weak and helpless, shaken in mind and nerve. ¹⁰It was to take her at a disadvantage to obtrude love upon her at such a time. ¹¹Worse still, she was rich. ¹²If Holmes's researches were successful, she would be an heiress. ¹³Was it fair, was it honorable, that a half-pay surgeon should take such advantage of an intimacy which chance had brought about? ¹⁴Might she not look upon me as a mere vulgar fortune-seeker? ¹⁵I could not bear to risk that such a thought should cross her mind. ¹⁶This Agra treasure intervened like an impassable barrier between us.

¹⁷It was nearly two o'clock when we reached Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. ¹⁸The servants had retired hours ago, but Mrs. Forrester had been so interested by the strange message which Miss Morstan had received that she had sat up in the hope of her return. ¹⁹She opened the door herself, a middle-aged, graceful woman, and it gave me joy to see how tenderly her arm stole round the other's waist and how motherly was the voice in which she greeted her. ²⁰She was clearly no mere paid dependant, but an honored friend. ²¹I was introduced, and Mrs. Forrester earnestly begged me to step in and tell her our adventures. ²²I explained, however, the importance of my errand, and promised faithfully to call and report any progress which we might make with the case. ²³As we drove away I stole a glance back, and I still seem to see that little group on the step, the two graceful, clinging figures, the half-opened door, the hall light shining through stained glass, the barometer, and the bright stair-rods. ²⁴It was soothing to catch even that passing glimpse of a tranquil English home in the midst of the wild, dark business which had absorbed us.

²⁵And the more I thought of what had happened, the wilder and darker it grew. ²⁶I reviewed the whole extraordinary sequence of events as I rattled on through the silent gas-lit streets. ²⁷There was the original problem: that at least was pretty clear now. ²⁸The death of Captain Morstan, the sending of the pearls, the advertisement, the letter,—we had had light upon all those events. ²⁹They had only led us, however, to a deeper and far more tragic mystery. ³⁰The Indian treasure, the curious plan found among Morstan's baggage, the strange scene at Major Sholto's death, the rediscovery of the treasure immediately followed by the murder of the discoverer, the very singular accompaniments to the crime, the footsteps, the remarkable weapons, the words upon the card, corresponding with those upon Captain Morstan's chart,—here was indeed a labyrinth in which a man less singularly endowed than my fellow-lodger might well despair of ever finding the clue.

³¹Pinchin Lane was a row of shabby two-storied brick houses in the lower quarter of Lambeth. ³²I had to knock for some time at No. 3 before I could make my impression. ³³At last, however, there was the glint of a candle behind the blind, and a face looked out at the upper window.

³⁴“Go on, you drunken vagabone,” said the face. ³⁵“If you kick up any more row I'll open the kennels and let out forty-three dogs upon you.”

³⁶“If you'll let one out it's just what I have come for,” said I.

³⁷“Go on!” yelled the voice. ³⁸“So help me gracious, I have a wiper in the bag, an' I'll drop it on your 'ead if you don't hook it.”

³⁹“But I want a dog,” I cried.

⁴⁰“I won't be argued with!” shouted Mr. Sherman. ⁴¹“Now stand clear, for when I say ‘three,’ down goes the wiper.”

⁴²“Mr. Sherlock Holmes—” I began, but the words had a most magical effect, for the window instantly slammed down, and within a minute the door was unbarred and open. ⁴³Mr. Sherman was a lanky, lean old man, with stooping shoulders, a stringy neck, and blue-tinted glasses.

⁴⁴“A friend of Mr. Sherlock is always welcome,” said he. ⁴⁵“Step in, sir. ⁴⁶Keep clear of the badger; for he bites. ⁴⁷Ah, naughty, naughty, would you take a nip at the gentleman?” ⁴⁸This to a stoat which thrust its wicked head and red eyes between the bars of its cage. ⁴⁹“Don't mind that, sir: it's only a slow-worm. ⁵⁰It hain't got no fangs, so I gives it the run o' the room, for it keeps the bettles down. ⁵¹You must not mind my bein' just a little short wi' you at first, for I'm guyed at by the children, and there's many a one just comes down this lane to knock me up. ⁵²What was it that Mr. Sherlock Holmes wanted, sir?”

⁵³“He wanted a dog of yours.”

⁵⁴“Ah! that would be Toby.”

⁵⁵“Yes, Toby was the name.”

⁵⁶“Toby lives at No. 7 on the left here.” ⁵⁷He moved slowly forward with his candle among the queer animal family which he had gathered round him. ⁵⁸In the uncertain, shadowy light I could see dimly that there were glancing, glimmering eyes peeping down at us from every cranny and corner. ⁵⁹Even the rafters above our heads were lined by solemn fowls, who lazily shifted their weight from one leg to the other as our voices disturbed their slumbers.

⁶⁰Toby proved to an ugly, long-haired, lop-eared creature, half spaniel and half lurcher, brown-and-white in color, with a very clumsy waddling gait. ⁶¹It accepted after some hesitation a lump of sugar which the old naturalist handed to me, and, having thus sealed an alliance, it followed me to the cab, and made no difficulties about accompanying me. ⁶²It had just struck three on the Palace clock when I found myself back once more at Pondicherry Lodge. ⁶³The ex-prize-fighter McMurdo had, I found, been arrested as an accessory, and both he and Mr. Sholto had been marched off to the station. ⁶⁴Two constables guarded the narrow gate, but they allowed me to pass with the dog on my mentioning the detective's name.

⁶⁵Holmes was standing on the door-step, with his hands in his pockets, smoking his pipe.

⁶⁶“Ah, you have him there!” said he. ⁶⁷“Good dog, then! ⁶⁸Athelney Jones has gone. ⁶⁹We have had an immense display of energy since you left. ⁷⁰He has arrested not only friend Thaddeus, but the gatekeeper, the housekeeper, and the Indian servant. ⁷¹We have the place to ourselves, but for a sergeant up-stairs. ⁷²Leave the dog here, and come up.”

⁷³We tied Toby to the hall table, and reascended the stairs. ⁷⁴The room was as we had left it, save that a sheet had been draped over the central figure. ⁷⁵A weary-looking police-sergeant reclined in the corner.

⁷⁶“Lend me your bull's-eye, sergeant,” said my companion. ⁷⁷“Now tie this bit of card round my neck, so as to hang it in front of me. ⁷⁸Thank you. ⁷⁹Now I must kick off my boots and stockings.— ⁸⁰Just you carry them down with you, Watson. ⁸¹I am going to do a little climbing. ⁸²And dip my handkerchief into the creasote. ⁸³That will do. ⁸⁴Now come up into the garret with me for a moment.”

⁸⁵We clambered up through the hole. ⁸⁶Holmes turned his light once more upon the footsteps in the dust.

⁸⁷"I wish you particularly to notice these footmarks," he said. ⁸⁸"Do you observe anything noteworthy about them?"

⁸⁹"They belong," I said, "to a child or a small woman."

⁹⁰"Apart from their size, though. ⁹¹Is there nothing else?"

⁹²"They appear to be much as other footmarks."

⁹³"Not at all. ⁹⁴Look here! ⁹⁵This is the print of a right foot in the dust. ⁹⁶Now I make one with my naked foot beside it. ⁹⁷What is the chief difference?"

⁹⁸"Your toes are all cramped together. ⁹⁹The other print has each toe distinctly divided."

¹⁰⁰"Quite so. ¹⁰¹That is the point. ¹⁰²Bear that in mind. ¹⁰³Now, would you kindly step over to that flap-window and smell the edge of the wood-work? ¹⁰⁴I shall stay here, as I have this handkerchief in my hand."

¹⁰⁵I did as he directed, and was instantly conscious of a strong tarry smell.

¹⁰⁶"That is where he put his foot in getting out. ¹⁰⁷If you can trace him, I should think that Toby will have no difficulty. ¹⁰⁸Now run down-stairs, loose the dog, and look out for Blondin."

¹⁰⁹By the time that I got out into the grounds Sherlock Holmes was on the roof, and I could see him like an enormous glow-worm crawling very slowly along the ridge. ¹¹⁰I lost sight of him behind a stack of chimneys, but he presently reappeared, and then vanished once more upon the opposite side. ¹¹¹When I made my way round there I found him seated at one of the corner eaves.

¹¹²"That You, Watson?" he cried.

¹¹³"Yes."

¹¹⁴"This is the place. ¹¹⁵What is that black thing down there?"

¹¹⁶"A water-barrel."

¹¹⁷"Top on it?"

¹¹⁸"Yes."

¹¹⁹"No sign of a ladder?"

¹²⁰"No."

¹²¹"Confound the fellow! ¹²²It's a most break-neck place. ¹²³I ought to be able to come down where he could climb up. ¹²⁴The water-pipe feels pretty firm. ¹²⁵Here goes, anyhow."

¹²⁶There was a scuffling of feet, and the lantern began to come steadily down the side of the wall. ¹²⁷Then with a light spring he came on to the barrel, and from there to the earth.

¹²⁸"It was easy to follow him," he said, drawing on his stockings and boots. ¹²⁹"Tiles were loosened the whole way along, and in his hurry he had dropped this. ¹³⁰It confirms my diagnosis, as you doctors express it."

¹³¹The object which he held up to me was a small pocket or pouch woven out of colored grasses and with a few tawdry beads strung round it. ¹³²In shape and size it was not unlike a cigarette-case. ¹³³Inside were half a dozen spines of dark wood, sharp at one end and rounded at the other, like that which had struck Bartholomew Sholto.

¹³⁴“They are hellish things,” said he. ¹³⁵“Look out that you don't prick yourself. ¹³⁶I'm delighted to have them, for the chances are that they are all he has. ¹³⁷There is the less fear of you or me finding one in our skin before long. ¹³⁸I would sooner face a Martini bullet, myself. ¹³⁹Are you game for a six-mile trudge, Watson?”

¹⁴⁰“Certainly,” I answered.

¹⁴¹“Your leg will stand it?”

¹⁴²“Oh, yes.”

¹⁴³“Here you are, doggy! ¹⁴⁴Good old Toby! ¹⁴⁵Smell it, Toby, smell it!” ¹⁴⁶He pushed the creasote handkerchief under the dog's nose, while the creature stood with its fluffy legs separated, and with a most comical cock to its head, like a connoisseur sniffing the bouquet of a famous vintage. ¹⁴⁷Holmes then threw the handkerchief to a distance, fastened a stout cord to the mongrel's collar, and let him to the foot of the water-barrel. ¹⁴⁸The creature instantly broke into a succession of high, tremulous yelps, and, with his nose on the ground, and his tail in the air, pattered off upon the trail at a pace which strained his leash and kept us at the top of our speed.

¹⁴⁹The east had been gradually whitening, and we could now see some distance in the cold gray light. ¹⁵⁰The square, massive house, with its black, empty windows and high, bare walls, towered up, sad and forlorn, behind us. ¹⁵¹Our course let right across the grounds, in and out among the trenches and pits with which they were scarred and intersected. ¹⁵²The whole place, with its scattered dirt-heaps and ill-grown shrubs, had a blighted, ill-omened look which harmonized with the black tragedy which hung over it.

¹⁵³On reaching the boundary wall Toby ran along, whining eagerly, underneath its shadow, and stopped finally in a corner screened by a young beech. ¹⁵⁴Where the two walls joined, several bricks had been loosened, and the crevices left were worn down and rounded upon the lower side, as though they had frequently been used as a ladder. ¹⁵⁵Holmes clambered up, and, taking the dog from me, he dropped it over upon the other side.

¹⁵⁶“There's the print of wooden-leg's hand,” he remarked, as I mounted up beside him. ¹⁵⁷“You see the slight smudge of blood upon the white plaster. ¹⁵⁸What a lucky thing it is that we have had no very heavy rain since yesterday! ¹⁵⁹The scent will lie upon the road in spite of their eight-and-twenty hours' start.”

¹⁶⁰I confess that I had my doubts myself when I reflected upon the great traffic which had passed along the London road in the interval. ¹⁶¹My fears were soon appeased, however. ¹⁶²Toby never hesitated or swerved, but waddled on in his peculiar rolling fashion. ¹⁶³Clearly, the pungent smell of the creasote rose high above all other contending scents.

¹⁶⁴“Do not imagine,” said Holmes, “that I depend for my success in this case upon the mere chance of one of these fellows having put his foot in the chemical. ¹⁶⁵I have knowledge now which would enable me to trace them in many different ways. ¹⁶⁶This, however, is the readiest and, since fortune has put it into our hands, I should be culpable if I neglected it. ¹⁶⁷It has, however, prevented the case from becoming the pretty little intellectual problem which it at one time promised to be. ¹⁶⁸There might have been some credit to be gained out of it, but for this too palpable clue.”

¹⁶⁹“There is credit, and to spare,” said I. ¹⁷⁰“I assure you, Holmes, that I marvel at the means by which you obtain your results in this case, even more than I did in the Jefferson Hope Murder. ¹⁷¹The thing seems to me to be deeper and more inexplicable. ¹⁷²How, for example, could you describe with such confidence the wooden-legged man?”

¹⁷³“Pshaw, my dear boy! it was simplicity itself. ¹⁷⁴I don't wish to be theatrical. ¹⁷⁵It is all patent and above-board. ¹⁷⁶Two officers who are in command of a convict-guard learn an important secret as to buried treasure. ¹⁷⁷A map is drawn for them by an Englishman named Jonathan Small. ¹⁷⁸You remember that we saw the name upon the chart in Captain Morstan's possession. ¹⁷⁹He had signed it in behalf of himself and his associates,—the sign of the four, as he somewhat dramatically called it. ¹⁸⁰Aided by this chart, the officers—or one of them—gets the treasure and brings it to England, leaving, we will suppose, some condition under which he received it unfulfilled. ¹⁸¹Now, then, why did not Jonathan Small get the treasure himself? ¹⁸²The answer is obvious. ¹⁸³The chart is dated at a time when Morstan was brought into close association with convicts. ¹⁸⁴Jonathan Small did not get the treasure because he and his associates were themselves convicts and could not get away.”

¹⁸⁵“But that is mere speculation,” said I.

¹⁸⁶“It is more than that. ¹⁸⁷It is the only hypothesis which covers the facts. ¹⁸⁸Let us see how it fits in with the sequel. ¹⁸⁹Major Sholto remains at peace for some years, happy in the possession of his treasure. ¹⁹⁰Then he receives a letter from India which gives him a great fright. ¹⁹¹What was that?”

¹⁹²“A letter to say that the men whom he had wronged had been set free.”

¹⁹³“Or had escaped. ¹⁹⁴That is much more likely, for he would have known what their term of imprisonment was. ¹⁹⁵It would not have been a surprise to him. ¹⁹⁶What does he do then? ¹⁹⁷He guards himself against a wooden-legged man,—a white man, mark you, for he mistakes a white tradesman for him, and actually fires a pistol at him. ¹⁹⁸Now, only one white man's name is on the chart. ¹⁹⁹The others are Hindoos or Mohammedans. ²⁰⁰There is no other white man. ²⁰¹Therefore we may say with confidence that the wooden-legged man is identical with Jonathan Small. ²⁰²Does the reasoning strike you as being faulty?”

²⁰³“No: it is clear and concise.”

²⁰⁴“Well, now, let us put ourselves in the place of Jonathan Small. ²⁰⁵Let us look at it from his point of view. ²⁰⁶He comes to England with the double idea of regaining what he would consider to be his rights and of having his revenge upon the man who had wronged him. ²⁰⁷He found out where Sholto lived, and very possibly he established communications with some one inside the house. ²⁰⁸There is this butler, Lal Rao, whom we have not seen. ²⁰⁹Mrs. Bernstone gives him far from a good character. ²¹⁰Small could not find out, however, where the treasure was hid, for no one ever knew, save the major and one faithful servant who had died. ²¹¹Suddenly Small learns that the major is on his death-bed. ²¹²In a frenzy lest the secret of the treasure die with him, he runs the gauntlet of the guards, makes his way to the dying man's window, and is only deterred from entering by the presence of his two sons. ²¹³Mad with hate, however, against the dead man, he enters the room that night, searches his private papers in the hope of discovering some memorandum relating to the treasure, and finally leaves a memento of his visit in the short inscription upon the card. ²¹⁴He had doubtless planned beforehand that should he slay the major he would leave some such record upon the body as a sign that it was not a common murder, but, from the point of view of the four associates, something in the nature of an act of justice. ²¹⁵Whimsical and bizarre conceits of this kind are common enough in the annals of crime, and usually afford valuable indications as to the criminal. ²¹⁶Do you follow all this?”

²¹⁷“Very clearly.”

²¹⁸“Now, what could Jonathan Small do? ²¹⁹He could only continue to keep a secret watch upon the efforts made to find the treasure. ²²⁰Possibly he leaves England and only comes back at intervals. ²²¹Then comes the discovery of the garret, and he is instantly informed of it. ²²²We again trace the presence of some confederate in the household. ²²³Jonathan, with his wooden leg, is utterly unable to reach the lofty room of Bartholomew Sholto. ²²⁴He takes with him, however, a rather curious associate, who gets over

this difficulty, but dips his naked foot into creasote, whence come Toby, and a six-mile limp for a half-pay officer with a damaged tendo Achillis.”

²²⁵“But it was the associate, and not Jonathan, who committed the crime.”

²²⁶“Quite so. ²²⁷And rather to Jonathan's disgust, to judge by the way the stamped about when he got into the room. ²²⁸He bore no grudge against Bartholomew Sholto, and would have preferred if he could have been simply bound and gagged. ²²⁹He did not wish to put his head in a halter. ²³⁰There was no help for it, however: the savage instincts of his companion had broken out, and the poison had done its work: so Jonathan Small left his record, lowered the treasure-box to the ground, and followed it himself. ²³¹That was the train of events as far as I can decipher them. ²³²Of course as to his personal appearance he must be middle-aged, and must be sunburned after serving his time in such an oven as the Andamans. ²³³His height is readily calculated from the length of his stride, and we know that he was bearded. ²³⁴His hairiness was the one point which impressed itself upon Thaddeus Sholto when he saw him at the window. ²³⁵I don't know that there is anything else.”

²³⁶“The associate?”

²³⁷“Ah, well, there is no great mystery in that. ²³⁸But you will know all about it soon enough. ²³⁹How sweet the morning air is! ²⁴⁰See how that one little cloud floats like a pink feather from some gigantic flamingo. ²⁴¹Now the red rim of the sun pushes itself over the London cloud-bank. ²⁴²It shines on a good many folk, but on none, I dare bet, who are on a stranger errand than you and I. ²⁴³How small we feel with our petty ambitions and strivings in the presence of the great elemental forces of nature! ²⁴⁴Are you well up in your Jean Paul?”

²⁴⁵“Fairly so. ²⁴⁶I worked back to him through Carlyle.”

²⁴⁷“That was like following the brook to the parent lake. ²⁴⁸He makes one curious but profound remark. ²⁴⁹It is that the chief proof of man's real greatness lies in his perception of his own smallness. ²⁵⁰It argues, you see, a power of comparison and of appreciation which is in itself a proof of nobility. ²⁵¹There is much food for thought in Richter. ²⁵²You have not a pistol, have you?”

²⁵³“I have my stick.”

²⁵⁴“It is just possible that we may need something of the sort if we get to their lair. ²⁵⁵Jonathan I shall leave to you, but if the other turns nasty I shall shoot him dead.” ²⁵⁶He took out his revolver as he spoke, and, having loaded two of the chambers, he put it back into the right-hand pocket of his jacket.

²⁵⁷We had during this time been following the guidance of Toby down the half-rural villa-lined roads which lead to the metropolis. ²⁵⁸Now, however, we were beginning to come among continuous streets, where laborers and dockmen were already astir, and slatternly women were taking down shutters and brushing door-steps. ²⁵⁹At the square-topped corner public houses business was just beginning, and rough-looking men were emerging, rubbing their sleeves across their beards after their morning wet. ²⁶⁰Strange dogs sauntered up and stared wonderingly at us as we passed, but our inimitable Toby looked neither to the right nor to the left, but trotted onwards with his nose to the ground and an occasional eager whine which spoke of a hot scent.

²⁶¹We had traversed Streatham, Brixton, Camberwell, and now found ourselves in Kennington Lane, having borne away through the side-streets to the east of the Oval. ²⁶²The men whom we pursued seemed to have taken a curiously zigzag road, with the idea probably of escaping observation. ²⁶³They had never kept to the main road if a parallel side-street would serve their turn. ²⁶⁴At the foot of Kennington Lane they had edged away to the left through Bond Street and Miles Street. ²⁶⁵Where the latter street turns into Knight's Place, Toby ceased to advance, but began to run backwards and forwards with one ear cocked and the other drooping, the very picture of canine indecision. ²⁶⁶Then he waddled round in circles, looking up to us from time to time, as if to ask for sympathy in his embarrassment.

²⁶⁷“What the deuce is the matter with the dog?” growled Holmes. ²⁶⁸“They surely would not take a cab, or go off in a balloon.”

²⁶⁹“Perhaps they stood here for some time,” I suggested.

²⁷⁰“Ah! it's all right. ²⁷¹He's off again,” said my companion, in a tone of relief.

²⁷²He was indeed off, for after sniffing round again he suddenly made up his mind, and darted away with an energy and determination such as he had not yet shown. ²⁷³The scent appeared to be much hotter than before, for he had not even to put his nose on the ground, but tugged at his leash and tried to break into a run. ²⁷⁴I could see by the gleam in Holmes's eyes that he thought we were nearing the end of our journey.

²⁷⁵Our course now ran down Nine Elms until we came to Broderick and Nelson's large timber-yard, just past the White Eagle tavern. ²⁷⁶Here the dog, frantic with excitement, turned down through the side-gate into the enclosure, where the sawyers were already at work. ²⁷⁷On the dog raced through sawdust and shavings, down an alley, round a passage, between two wood-piles, and finally, with a triumphant yelp, sprang upon a large barrel which still stood upon the hand-trolley on which it had been brought. ²⁷⁸With lolling tongue and blinking eyes, Toby stood upon the cask, looking from one to the other of us for some sign of appreciation. ²⁷⁹The staves of the barrel and the wheels of the trolley were smeared with a dark liquid, and the whole air was heavy with the smell of creasote.

²⁸⁰Sherlock Holmes and I looked blankly at each other, and then burst simultaneously into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Chapter VIII.

The Baker Street Irregulars

¹“What now?” I asked. ²“Toby has lost his character for infallibility.”

³“He acted according to his lights,” said Holmes, lifting him down from the barrel and walking him out of the timber-yard. ⁴“If you consider how much creasote is carted about London in one day, it is no great wonder that our trail should have been crossed. ⁵It is much used now, especially for the seasoning of wood. ⁶Poor Toby is not to blame.”

⁷“We must get on the main scent again, I suppose.”

⁸“Yes. ⁹And, fortunately, we have no distance to go. ¹⁰Evidently what puzzled the dog at the corner of Knight's Place was that there were two different trails running in opposite directions. ¹¹We took the wrong one. ¹²It only remains to follow the other.”

¹³There was no difficulty about this. ¹⁴On leading Toby to the place where he had committed his fault, he cast about in a wide circle and finally dashed off in a fresh direction.

¹⁵“We must take care that he does not now bring us to the place where the creasote-barrel came from,” I observed.

¹⁶“I had thought of that. ¹⁷But you notice that he keeps on the pavement, whereas the barrel passed down the roadway. ¹⁸No, we are on the true scent now.”

¹⁹It tended down towards the river-side, running through Belmont Place and Prince's Street. ²⁰At the end of Broad Street it ran right down to the water's edge, where there was a small wooden wharf. ²¹Toby led us to the very edge of this, and there stood whining, looking out on the dark current beyond.

²²“We are out of luck,” said Holmes. ²³“They have taken to a boat here.” ²⁴Several small punts and skiffs were lying about in the water and on the edge of the wharf. ²⁵We took Toby round to each in turn, but, though he sniffed earnestly, he made no sign.

²⁶Close to the rude landing-stage was a small brick house, with a wooden placard slung out through the second window. ²⁷“Mordecai Smith” was printed across it in large letters, and, underneath, “Boats to hire by the hour or day.” ²⁸A second inscription above the door informed us that a steam launch was kept,—a statement which was confirmed by a great pile of coke upon the jetty. ²⁹Sherlock Holmes looked slowly round, and his face assumed an ominous expression.

³⁰“This looks bad,” said he. ³¹“These fellows are sharper than I expected. ³²They seem to have covered their tracks. ³³There has, I fear, been preconcerted management here.”

³⁴He was approaching the door of the house, when it opened, and a little, curly-headed lad of six came running out, followed by a stoutish, red-faced woman with a large sponge in her hand.

³⁵“You come back and be washed, Jack,” she shouted. ³⁶“Come back, you young imp; for if your father comes home and finds you like that, he'll let us hear of it.”

³⁷“Dear little chap!” said Holmes, strategically. ³⁸“What a rosy-cheeked young rascal! ³⁹Now, Jack, is there anything you would like?”

⁴⁰The youth pondered for a moment. ⁴¹“I'd like a shillin',” said he.

⁴²“Nothing you would like better?”

⁴³“I'd like two shillin' better,” the prodigy answered, after some thought.

⁴⁴“Here you are, then! ⁴⁵Catch!—A fine child, Mrs. Smith!”

⁴⁶“Lor' bless you, sir, he is that, and forward. ⁴⁷He gets a'most too much for me to manage, 'specially when my man is away days at a time.”

⁴⁸“Away, is he?” said Holmes, in a disappointed voice. ⁴⁹“I am sorry for that, for I wanted to speak to Mr. Smith.”

⁵⁰“He's been away since yesterday mornin', sir, and, truth to tell, I am beginnin' to feel frightened about him. ⁵¹But if it was about a boat, sir, maybe I could serve as well.”

⁵²“I wanted to hire his steam launch.”

⁵³“Why, bless you, sir, it is in the steam launch that he has gone. ⁵⁴That's what puzzles me; for I know there ain't more coals in her than would take her to about Woolwich and back. ⁵⁵If he'd been away in the barge I'd ha' thought nothin'; for many a time a job has taken him as far as Gravesend, and then if there was much doin' there he might ha' stayed over. ⁵⁶But what good is a steam launch without coals?”

⁵⁷“He might have bought some at a wharf down the river.”

⁵⁸“He might, sir, but it weren't his way. ⁵⁹Many a time I've heard him call out at the prices they charge for a few odd bags. ⁶⁰Besides, I don't like that wooden-legged man, wi' his ugly face and outlandish talk. ⁶¹What did he want always knockin' about here for?”

⁶²“A wooden-legged man?” said Holmes, with bland surprise.

⁶³“Yes, sir, a brown, monkey-faced chap that's called more'n once for my old man. ⁶⁴It was him that roused him up yesternight, and, what's more, my man knew he was comin', for he had steam up in the launch. ⁶⁵I tell you straight, sir, I don't feel easy in my mind about it.”

⁶⁶“But, my dear Mrs. Smith,” said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders, “You are frightening yourself about nothing. ⁶⁷How could you possibly tell that it was the wooden-legged man who came in the night? ⁶⁸I don't quite understand how you can be so sure.”

⁶⁹“His voice, sir. ⁷⁰I knew his voice, which is kind o' thick and foggy. ⁷¹He tapped at the winder,—about three it would be. ⁷²‘Show a leg, matey,’ says he: ‘time to turn out guard.’ ⁷³My old man woke up Jim,—that's my eldest,—and away they went, without so much as a word to me. ⁷⁴I could hear the wooden leg clackin' on the stones.”

⁷⁵“And was this wooden-legged man alone?”

⁷⁶“Couldn't say, I am sure, sir. ⁷⁷I didn't hear no one else.”

⁷⁸“I am sorry, Mrs. Smith, for I wanted a steam launch, and I have heard good reports of the— ⁷⁹Let me see, what is her name?”

⁸⁰“The Aurora, sir.”

⁸¹“Ah! ⁸²She's not that old green launch with a yellow line, very broad in the beam?”

⁸³“No, indeed. ⁸⁴She's as trim a little thing as any on the river. ⁸⁵She's been fresh painted, black with two red streaks.”

⁸⁶“Thanks. ⁸⁷I hope that you will hear soon from Mr. Smith. ⁸⁸I am going down the river; and if I should see anything of the Aurora I shall let him know that you are uneasy. ⁸⁹A black funnel, you say?”

⁹⁰“No, sir. ⁹¹Black with a white band.”

⁹²“Ah, of course. ⁹³It was the sides which were black. ⁹⁴Good-morning, Mrs. Smith.— ⁹⁵There is a boatman here with a wherry, Watson. ⁹⁶We shall take it and cross the river.

⁹⁷“The main thing with people of that sort,” said Holmes, as we sat in the sheets of the wherry, “is never to let them think that their information can be of the slightest importance to you. ⁹⁸If you do, they will instantly shut up like an oyster. ⁹⁹If you listen to them under protest, as it were, you are very likely to get what you want.”

¹⁰⁰“Our course now seems pretty clear,” said I.

¹⁰¹“What would you do, then?”

¹⁰²“I would engage a launch and go down the river on the track of the Aurora.”

¹⁰³“My dear fellow, it would be a colossal task. ¹⁰⁴She may have touched at any wharf on either side of the stream between here and Greenwich. ¹⁰⁵Below the bridge there is a perfect labyrinth of landing-places for miles. ¹⁰⁶It would take you days and days to exhaust them, if you set about it alone.”

¹⁰⁷“Employ the police, then.”

¹⁰⁸“No. ¹⁰⁹I shall probably call Athelney Jones in at the last moment. ¹¹⁰He is not a bad fellow, and I should not like to do anything which would injure him professionally. ¹¹¹But I have a fancy for working it out myself, now that we have gone so far.”

¹¹²“Could we advertise, then, asking for information from wharfingers?”

¹¹³“Worse and worse! ¹¹⁴Our men would know that the chase was hot at their heels, and they would be off out of the country. ¹¹⁵As it is, they are likely enough to leave, but as long as they think they are perfectly safe they will be in no hurry. ¹¹⁶Jones's energy will be of use to us there, for his view of the case is sure to push itself into the daily press, and the runaways will think that every one is off on the wrong scent.”

¹¹⁷“What are we to do, then?” I asked, as we landed near Millbank Penitentiary.

¹¹⁸“Take this hansom, drive home, have some breakfast, and get an hour's sleep. ¹¹⁹It is quite on the cards that we may be afoot to-night again. ¹²⁰Stop at a telegraph-office, cabby! ¹²¹We will keep Toby, for he may be of use to us yet.”

¹²²We pulled up at the Great Peter Street post-office, and Holmes despatched his wire. ¹²³“Whom do you think that is to?” he asked, as we resumed our journey.

¹²⁴“I am sure I don't know.”

¹²⁵“You remember the Baker Street division of the detective police force whom I employed in the Jefferson Hope case?”

¹²⁶“Well,” said I, laughing.

¹²⁷“This is just the case where they might be invaluable. ¹²⁸If they fail, I have other resources; but I shall try them first. ¹²⁹That wire was to my dirty little lieutenant, Wiggins, and I expect that he and his gang will be with us before we have finished our breakfast.”

¹³⁰It was between eight and nine o'clock now, and I was conscious of a strong reaction after the successive excitements of the night. ¹³¹I was limp and weary, befogged in mind and fatigued in body. ¹³²I had not the professional enthusiasm which carried my companion on, nor could I look at the matter as a mere abstract intellectual problem. ¹³³As far as the death of Bartholomew Sholto went, I had heard little good of him, and could feel no intense antipathy to his murderers. ¹³⁴The treasure, however, was a different matter. ¹³⁵That, or part of it, belonged rightfully to Miss Morstan. ¹³⁶While there was a chance

of recovering it I was ready to devote my life to the one object. ¹³⁷True, if I found it it would probably put her forever beyond my reach. ¹³⁸Yet it would be a petty and selfish love which would be influenced by such a thought as that. ¹³⁹If Holmes could work to find the criminals, I had a tenfold stronger reason to urge me on to find the treasure.

¹⁴⁰A bath at Baker Street and a complete change freshened me up wonderfully. ¹⁴¹When I came down to our room I found the breakfast laid and Holmes pouring out the coffee.

¹⁴²"Here it is," said he, laughing, and pointing to an open newspaper. ¹⁴³"The energetic Jones and the ubiquitous reporter have fixed it up between them. ¹⁴⁴But you have had enough of the case. ¹⁴⁵Better have your ham and eggs first."

¹⁴⁶I took the paper from him and read the short notice, which was headed "Mysterious Business at Upper Norwood."

¹⁴⁷"About twelve o'clock last night," said the Standard, "Mr. Bartholomew Sholto, of Pondicherry Lodge, Upper Norwood, was found dead in his room under circumstances which point to foul play. ¹⁴⁸As far as we can learn, no actual traces of violence were found upon Mr. Sholto's person, but a valuable collection of Indian gems which the deceased gentleman had inherited from his father has been carried off. ¹⁴⁹The discovery was first made by Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, who had called at the house with Mr. Thaddeus Sholto, brother of the deceased. ¹⁵⁰By a singular piece of good fortune, Mr. Athelney Jones, the well-known member of the detective police force, happened to be at the Norwood Police Station, and was on the ground within half an hour of the first alarm. ¹⁵¹His trained and experienced faculties were at once directed towards the detection of the criminals, with the gratifying result that the brother, Thaddeus Sholto, has already been arrested, together with the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, an Indian butler named Lal Rao, and a porter, or gatekeeper, named McMurdo. ¹⁵²It is quite certain that the thief or thieves were well acquainted with the house, for Mr. Jones's well-known technical knowledge and his powers of minute observation have enabled him to prove conclusively that the miscreants could not have entered by the door or by the window, but must have made their way across the roof of the building, and so through a trap-door into a room which communicated with that in which the body was found. ¹⁵³This fact, which has been very clearly made out, proves conclusively that it was no mere haphazard burglary. ¹⁵⁴The prompt and energetic action of the officers of the law shows the great advantage of the presence on such occasions of a single vigorous and masterful mind. ¹⁵⁵We cannot but think that it supplies an argument to those who would wish to see our detectives more decentralized, and so brought into closer and more effective touch with the cases which it is their duty to investigate."

¹⁵⁶"Isn't it gorgeous!" said Holmes, grinning over his coffee-cup. ¹⁵⁷"What do you think of it?"

¹⁵⁸"I think that we have had a close shave ourselves of being arrested for the crime."

¹⁵⁹"So do I. ¹⁶⁰I wouldn't answer for our safety now, if he should happen to have another of his attacks of energy."

¹⁶¹At this moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and I could hear Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, raising her voice in a wail of expostulation and dismay.

¹⁶²"By heaven, Holmes," I said, half rising, "I believe that they are really after us."

¹⁶³"No, it's not quite so bad as that. ¹⁶⁴It is the unofficial force,—the Baker Street irregulars."

¹⁶⁵As he spoke, there came a swift pattering of naked feet upon the stairs, a clatter of high voices, and in rushed a dozen dirty and ragged little street-Arabs. ¹⁶⁶There was some show of discipline among them, despite their tumultuous entry, for they instantly drew up in line and stood facing us with

expectant faces. ¹⁶⁷One of their number, taller and older than the others, stood forward with an air of lounging superiority which was very funny in such a disreputable little scarecrow.

¹⁶⁸“Got your message, sir,” said he, “and brought ‘em on sharp. ¹⁶⁹Three bob and a tanner for tickets.”

¹⁷⁰“Here you are,” said Holmes, producing some silver. ¹⁷¹“In future they can report to you, Wiggins, and you to me. ¹⁷²I cannot have the house invaded in this way. ¹⁷³However, it is just as well that you should all hear the instructions. ¹⁷⁴I want to find the whereabouts of a steam launch called the Aurora, owner Mordecai Smith, black with two red streaks, funnel black with a white band. ¹⁷⁵She is down the river somewhere. ¹⁷⁶I want one boy to be at Mordecai Smith's landing-stage opposite Millbank to say if the boat comes back. ¹⁷⁷You must divide it out among yourselves, and do both banks thoroughly. ¹⁷⁸Let me know the moment you have news. ¹⁷⁹Is that all clear?”

¹⁸⁰“Yes, guv'nor,” said Wiggins.

¹⁸¹“The old scale of pay, and a guinea to the boy who finds the boat. ¹⁸²Here's a day in advance. ¹⁸³Now off you go!” ¹⁸⁴He handed them a shilling each, and away they buzzed down the stairs, and I saw them a moment later streaming down the street.

¹⁸⁵“If the launch is above water they will find her,” said Holmes, as he rose from the table and lit his pipe. ¹⁸⁶“They can go everywhere, see everything, overhear every one. ¹⁸⁷I expect to hear before evening that they have spotted her. ¹⁸⁸In the mean while, we can do nothing but await results. ¹⁸⁹We cannot pick up the broken trail until we find either the Aurora or Mr. Mordecai Smith.”

¹⁹⁰“Toby could eat these scraps, I dare say. ¹⁹¹Are you going to bed, Holmes?”

¹⁹²“No: I am not tired. ¹⁹³I have a curious constitution. ¹⁹⁴I never remember feeling tired by work, though idleness exhausts me completely. ¹⁹⁵I am going to smoke and to think over this queer business to which my fair client has introduced us. ¹⁹⁶If ever man had an easy task, this of ours ought to be. ¹⁹⁷Wooden-legged men are not so common, but the other man must, I should think, be absolutely unique.”

¹⁹⁸“That other man again!”

¹⁹⁹“I have no wish to make a mystery of him,—to you, anyway. ²⁰⁰But you must have formed your own opinion. ²⁰¹Now, do consider the data. ²⁰²Diminutive footmarks, toes never fettered by boots, naked feet, stone-headed wooden mace, great agility, small poisoned darts. ²⁰³What do you make of all this?”

²⁰⁴“A savage!” I exclaimed. ²⁰⁵“Perhaps one of those Indians who were the associates of Jonathan Small.”

²⁰⁶“Hardly that,” said he. ²⁰⁷“When first I saw signs of strange weapons I was inclined to think so; but the remarkable character of the footmarks caused me to reconsider my views. ²⁰⁸Some of the inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula are small men, but none could have left such marks as that. ²⁰⁹The Hindoo proper has long and thin feet. ²¹⁰The sandal-wearing Mohammedan has the great toe well separated from the others, because the thong is commonly passed between. ²¹¹These little darts, too, could only be shot in one way. ²¹²They are from a blow-pipe. ²¹³Now, then, where are we to find our savage?”

²¹⁴“South American,” I hazarded.

²¹⁵He stretched his hand up, and took down a bulky volume from the shelf. ²¹⁶“This is the first volume of a gazetteer which is now being published. ²¹⁷It may be looked upon as the very latest authority. ²¹⁸What have we here? ²¹⁹‘Andaman Islands, situated 340 miles to the north of Sumatra, in the Bay of Bengal.’ ²²⁰Hum! hum! ²²¹What's all this? ²²²Moist climate, coral reefs, sharks, Port Blair, convict-barracks, Rutland Island, cottonwoods— ²²³Ah, here we are. ²²⁴‘The aborigines of the Andaman Islands may perhaps claim the distinction of being the smallest race upon this earth, though some anthropologists prefer the Bushmen of Africa, the Digger Indians of America, and the Terra del

Fuegians. ²²⁵The average height is rather below four feet, although many full-grown adults may be found who are very much smaller than this. ²²⁶They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their confidence has once been gained.' ²²⁷Mark that, Watson. ²²⁸Now, then, listen to this. ²²⁹'They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. ²³⁰Their feet and hands, however, are remarkably small. ²³¹So intractable and fierce are they that all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in any degree. ²³²They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews, braining the survivors with their stone-headed clubs, or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. ²³³These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast.' ²³⁴Nice, amiable people, Watson! ²³⁵If this fellow had been left to his own unaided devices this affair might have taken an even more ghastly turn. ²³⁶I fancy that, even as it is, Jonathan Small would give a good deal not to have employed him."

²³⁷"But how came he to have so singular a companion?"

²³⁸"Ah, that is more than I can tell. ²³⁹Since, however, we had already determined that Small had come from the Andamans, it is not so very wonderful that this islander should be with him. ²⁴⁰No doubt we shall know all about it in time. ²⁴¹Look here, Watson; you look regularly done. ²⁴²Lie down there on the sofa, and see if I can put you to sleep."

²⁴³He took up his violin from the corner, and as I stretched myself out he began to play some low, dreamy, melodious air,—his own, no doubt, for he had a remarkable gift for improvisation. ²⁴⁴I have a vague remembrance of his gaunt limbs, his earnest face, and the rise and fall of his bow. ²⁴⁵Then I seemed to be floated peacefully away upon a soft sea of sound, until I found myself in dream-land, with the sweet face of Mary Morstan looking down upon me.

Chapter IX.

A Break in the Chain

¹It was late in the afternoon before I woke, strengthened and refreshed. ²Sherlock Holmes still sat exactly as I had left him, save that he had laid aside his violin and was deep in a book. ³He looked across at me, as I stirred, and I noticed that his face was dark and troubled.

⁴"You have slept soundly," he said. ⁵"I feared that our talk would wake you."

⁶"I heard nothing," I answered. ⁷"Have you had fresh news, then?"

⁸"Unfortunately, no. ⁹I confess that I am surprised and disappointed. ¹⁰I expected something definite by this time. ¹¹Wiggins has just been up to report. ¹²He says that no trace can be found of the launch. ¹³It is a provoking check, for every hour is of importance."

¹⁴"Can I do anything? ¹⁵I am perfectly fresh now, and quite ready for another night's outing."

¹⁶"No, we can do nothing. ¹⁷We can only wait. ¹⁸If we go ourselves, the message might come in our absence, and delay be caused. ¹⁹You can do what you will, but I must remain on guard."

²⁰"Then I shall run over to Camberwell and call upon Mrs. Cecil Forrester. ²¹She asked me to, yesterday."

²²"On Mrs. Cecil Forrester?" asked Holmes, with the twinkle of a smile in his eyes.

²³"Well, of course Miss Morstan too. ²⁴They were anxious to hear what happened."

²⁵"I would not tell them too much," said Holmes. ²⁶"Women are never to be entirely trusted,—not the best of them."

²⁷I did not pause to argue over this atrocious sentiment. ²⁸"I shall be back in an hour or two," I remarked.

²⁹"All right! ³⁰Good luck! ³¹But, I say, if you are crossing the river you may as well return Toby, for I don't think it is at all likely that we shall have any use for him now."

³²I took our mongrel accordingly, and left him, together with a half-sovereign, at the old naturalist's in Pinchin Lane. ³³At Camberwell I found Miss Morstan a little weary after her night's adventures, but very eager to hear the news. ³⁴Mrs. Forrester, too, was full of curiosity. ³⁵I told them all that we had done, suppressing, however, the more dreadful parts of the tragedy. ³⁶Thus, although I spoke of Mr. Sholto's death, I said nothing of the exact manner and method of it. ³⁷With all my omissions, however, there was enough to startle and amaze them.

³⁸"It is a romance!" cried Mrs. Forrester. ³⁹"An injured lady, half a million in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian. ⁴⁰They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl."

⁴¹"And two knight-errants to the rescue," added Miss Morstan, with a bright glance at me.

⁴²"Why, Mary, your fortune depends upon the issue of this search. ⁴³I don't think that you are nearly excited enough. ⁴⁴Just imagine what it must be to be so rich, and to have the world at your feet!"

⁴⁵It sent a little thrill of joy to my heart to notice that she showed no sign of elation at the prospect. ⁴⁶On the contrary, she gave a toss of her proud head, as though the matter were one in which she took small interest.

⁴⁷“It is for Mr. Thaddeus Sholto that I am anxious,” she said. ⁴⁸“Nothing else is of any consequence; but I think that he has behaved most kindly and honorably throughout. ⁴⁹It is our duty to clear him of this dreadful and unfounded charge.”

⁵⁰It was evening before I left Camberwell, and quite dark by the time I reached home. ⁵¹My companion's book and pipe lay by his chair, but he had disappeared. ⁵²I looked about in the hope of seeing a note, but there was none.

⁵³“I suppose that Mr. Sherlock Holmes has gone out,” I said to Mrs. Hudson as she came up to lower the blinds.

⁵⁴“No, sir. ⁵⁵He has gone to his room, sir. ⁵⁶Do you know, sir,” sinking her voice into an impressive whisper, “I am afraid for his health?”

⁵⁷“Why so, Mrs. Hudson?”

⁵⁸“Well, he's that strange, sir. ⁵⁹After you was gone he walked and he walked, up and down, and up and down, until I was weary of the sound of his footstep. ⁶⁰Then I heard him talking to himself and muttering, and every time the bell rang out he came on the stairhead, with ‘What is that, Mrs. Hudson?’

⁶¹And now he has slammed off to his room, but I can hear him walking away the same as ever. ⁶²I hope he's not going to be ill, sir. ⁶³I ventured to say something to him about cooling medicine, but he turned on me, sir, with such a look that I don't know how ever I got out of the room.”

⁶⁴“I don't think that you have any cause to be uneasy, Mrs. Hudson,” I answered. ⁶⁵“I have seen him like this before. ⁶⁶He has some small matter upon his mind which makes him restless.” ⁶⁷I tried to speak lightly to our worthy landlady, but I was myself somewhat uneasy when through the long night I still from time to time heard the dull sound of his tread, and knew how his keen spirit was chafing against this involuntary inaction.

⁶⁸At breakfast-time he looked worn and haggard, with a little fleck of feverish color upon either cheek.

⁶⁹“You are knocking yourself up, old man,” I remarked. ⁷⁰“I heard you marching about in the night.”

⁷¹“No, I could not sleep,” he answered. ⁷²“This infernal problem is consuming me. ⁷³It is too much to be balked by so petty an obstacle, when all else had been overcome. ⁷⁴I know the men, the launch, everything; and yet I can get no news. ⁷⁵I have set other agencies at work, and used every means at my disposal. ⁷⁶The whole river has been searched on either side, but there is no news, nor has Mrs. Smith heard of her husband. ⁷⁷I shall come to the conclusion soon that they have scuttled the craft. ⁷⁸But there are objections to that.”

⁷⁹“Or that Mrs. Smith has put us on a wrong scent.”

⁸⁰“No, I think that may be dismissed. ⁸¹I had inquiries made, and there is a launch of that description.”

⁸²“Could it have gone up the river?”

⁸³“I have considered that possibility too, and there is a search-party who will work up as far as Richmond. ⁸⁴If no news comes to-day, I shall start off myself to-morrow, and go for the men rather than the boat. ⁸⁵But surely, surely, we shall hear something.”

⁸⁶We did not, however. ⁸⁷Not a word came to us either from Wiggins or from the other agencies. ⁸⁸There were articles in most of the papers upon the Norwood tragedy. ⁸⁹They all appeared to be rather hostile to the unfortunate Thaddeus Sholto. ⁹⁰No fresh details were to be found, however, in any of them, save that an inquest was to be held upon the following day. ⁹¹I walked over to Camberwell in the evening to report our ill success to the ladies, and on my return I found Holmes dejected and somewhat morose. ⁹²He would hardly reply to my questions, and busied himself all evening in an abstruse chemical

analysis which involved much heating of retorts and distilling of vapors, ending at last in a smell which fairly drove me out of the apartment. ⁹³Up to the small hours of the morning I could hear the clinking of his test-tubes which told me that he was still engaged in his malodorous experiment.

⁹⁴In the early dawn I woke with a start, and was surprised to find him standing by my bedside, clad in a rude sailor dress with a pea-jacket, and a coarse red scarf round his neck.

⁹⁵"I am off down the river, Watson," said he. ⁹⁶"I have been turning it over in my mind, and I can see only one way out of it. ⁹⁷It is worth trying, at all events."

⁹⁸"Surely I can come with you, then?" said I.

⁹⁹"No; you can be much more useful if you will remain here as my representative. ¹⁰⁰I am loath to go, for it is quite on the cards that some message may come during the day, though Wiggins was despondent about it last night. ¹⁰¹I want you to open all notes and telegrams, and to act on your own judgment if any news should come. ¹⁰²Can I rely upon you?"

¹⁰³"Most certainly."

¹⁰⁴"I am afraid that you will not be able to wire to me, for I can hardly tell yet where I may find myself.

¹⁰⁵If I am in luck, however, I may not be gone so very long. ¹⁰⁶I shall have news of some sort or other before I get back."

¹⁰⁷I had heard nothing of him by breakfast-time. ¹⁰⁸On opening the Standard, however, I found that there was a fresh allusion to the business.

¹⁰⁹"With reference to the Upper Norwood tragedy," it remarked, "we have reason to believe that the matter promises to be even more complex and mysterious than was originally supposed. ¹¹⁰Fresh evidence has shown that it is quite impossible that Mr. Thaddeus Sholto could have been in any way concerned in the matter. ¹¹¹He and the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, were both released yesterday evening. ¹¹²It is believed, however, that the police have a clue as to the real culprits, and that it is being prosecuted by Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard, with all his well-known energy and sagacity. ¹¹³Further arrests may be expected at any moment."

¹¹⁴"That is satisfactory so far as it goes," thought I. ¹¹⁵"Friend Sholto is safe, at any rate. ¹¹⁶I wonder what the fresh clue may be; though it seems to be a stereotyped form whenever the police have made a blunder."

¹¹⁷I tossed the paper down upon the table, but at that moment my eye caught an advertisement in the agony column. ¹¹⁸It ran in this way:

¹¹⁹"Lost.— ¹²⁰Whereas Mordecai Smith, boatman, and his son, Jim, left Smith's Wharf at or about three o'clock last Tuesday morning in the steam launch Aurora, black with two red stripes, funnel black with a white band, the sum of five pounds will be paid to any one who can give information to Mrs. Smith, at Smith's Wharf, or at 221b Baker Street, as to the whereabouts of the said Mordecai Smith and the launch Aurora."

¹²¹This was clearly Holmes's doing. ¹²²The Baker Street address was enough to prove that. ¹²³It struck me as rather ingenious, because it might be read by the fugitives without their seeing in it more than the natural anxiety of a wife for her missing husband.

¹²⁴It was a long day. ¹²⁵Every time that a knock came to the door, or a sharp step passed in the street, I imagined that it was either Holmes returning or an answer to his advertisement. ¹²⁶I tried to read, but my thoughts would wander off to our strange quest and to the ill-assorted and villainous pair whom we were pursuing. ¹²⁷Could there be, I wondered, some radical flaw in my companion's reasoning. ¹²⁸Might he be suffering from some huge self-deception? ¹²⁹Was it not possible that his nimble and speculative

mind had built up this wild theory upon faulty premises? ¹³⁰I had never known him to be wrong; and yet the keenest reasoner may occasionally be deceived. ¹³¹He was likely, I thought, to fall into error through the over-refinement of his logic,—his preference for a subtle and bizarre explanation when a plainer and more commonplace one lay ready to his hand. ¹³²Yet, on the other hand, I had myself seen the evidence, and I had heard the reasons for his deductions. ¹³³When I looked back on the long chain of curious circumstances, many of them trivial in themselves, but all tending in the same direction, I could not disguise from myself that even if Holmes's explanation were incorrect the true theory must be equally outré and startling.

¹³⁴At three o'clock in the afternoon there was a loud peal at the bell, an authoritative voice in the hall, and, to my surprise, no less a person than Mr. Athelney Jones was shown up to me. ¹³⁵Very different was he, however, from the brusque and masterful professor of common sense who had taken over the case so confidently at Upper Norwood. ¹³⁶His expression was downcast, and his bearing meek and even apologetic.

¹³⁷"Good-day, sir; good-day," said he. ¹³⁸"Mr. Sherlock Holmes is out, I understand."

¹³⁹"Yes, and I cannot be sure when he will be back. ¹⁴⁰But perhaps you would care to wait. ¹⁴¹Take that chair and try one of these cigars."

¹⁴²"Thank you; I don't mind if I do," said he, mopping his face with a red bandanna handkerchief.

¹⁴³"And a whiskey-and-soda?"

¹⁴⁴"Well, half a glass. ¹⁴⁵It is very hot for the time of year; and I have had a good deal to worry and try me. ¹⁴⁶You know my theory about this Norwood case?"

¹⁴⁷"I remember that you expressed one."

¹⁴⁸"Well, I have been obliged to reconsider it. ¹⁴⁹I had my net drawn tightly round Mr. Sholto, sir, when pop he went through a hole in the middle of it. ¹⁵⁰He was able to prove an alibi which could not be shaken. ¹⁵¹From the time that he left his brother's room he was never out of sight of some one or other. ¹⁵²So it could not be he who climbed over roofs and through trap-doors. ¹⁵³It's a very dark case, and my professional credit is at stake. ¹⁵⁴I should be very glad of a little assistance."

¹⁵⁵"We all need help sometimes," said I.

¹⁵⁶"Your friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes is a wonderful man, sir," said he, in a husky and confidential voice. ¹⁵⁷"He's a man who is not to be beat. ¹⁵⁸I have known that young man go into a good many cases, but I never saw the case yet that he could not throw a light upon. ¹⁵⁹He is irregular in his methods, and a little quick perhaps in jumping at theories, but, on the whole, I think he would have made a most promising officer, and I don't care who knows it. ¹⁶⁰I have had a wire from him this morning, by which I understand that he has got some clue to this Sholto business. ¹⁶¹Here is the message."

¹⁶²He took the telegram out of his pocket, and handed it to me. ¹⁶³It was dated from Poplar at twelve o'clock. ¹⁶⁴"Go to Baker Street at once," it said. ¹⁶⁵"If I have not returned, wait for me. ¹⁶⁶I am close on the track of the Sholto gang. ¹⁶⁷You can come with us to-night if you want to be in at the finish."

¹⁶⁸"This sounds well. ¹⁶⁹He has evidently picked up the scent again," said I.

¹⁷⁰"Ah, then he has been at fault too," exclaimed Jones, with evident satisfaction. ¹⁷¹"Even the best of us are thrown off sometimes. ¹⁷²Of course this may prove to be a false alarm; but it is my duty as an officer of the law to allow no chance to slip. ¹⁷³But there is some one at the door. ¹⁷⁴Perhaps this is he."

¹⁷⁵A heavy step was heard ascending the stair, with a great wheezing and rattling as from a man who was sorely put to it for breath. ¹⁷⁶Once or twice he stopped, as though the climb were too much for him,

but at last he made his way to our door and entered. ¹⁷⁶His appearance corresponded to the sounds which we had heard. ¹⁷⁷He was an aged man, clad in seafaring garb, with an old pea-jacket buttoned up to his throat. ¹⁷⁸His back was bowed, his knees were shaky, and his breathing was painfully asthmatic. ¹⁷⁹As he leaned upon a thick oaken cudgel his shoulders heaved in the effort to draw the air into his lungs. ¹⁸⁰He had a colored scarf round his chin, and I could see little of his face save a pair of keen dark eyes, overhung by bushy white brows, and long gray side-whiskers. ¹⁸¹Altogether he gave me the impression of a respectable master mariner who had fallen into years and poverty.

¹⁸²“What is it, my man?” I asked.

¹⁸³He looked about him in the slow methodical fashion of old age.

¹⁸⁴“Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?” said he.

¹⁸⁵“No; but I am acting for him. ¹⁸⁶You can tell me any message you have for him.”

¹⁸⁷“It was to him himself I was to tell it,” said he.

¹⁸⁸“But I tell you that I am acting for him. ¹⁸⁹Was it about Mordecai Smith's boat?”

¹⁹⁰“Yes. ¹⁹¹I knows well where it is. ¹⁹²An' I knows where the men he is after are. ¹⁹³An' I knows where the treasure is. ¹⁹⁴I knows all about it.”

¹⁹⁵“Then tell me, and I shall let him know.”

¹⁹⁶“It was to him I was to tell it,” he repeated, with the petulant obstinacy of a very old man.

¹⁹⁷“Well, you must wait for him.”

¹⁹⁸“No, no; I ain't goin' to lose a whole day to please no one. ¹⁹⁹If Mr. Holmes ain't here, then Mr. Holmes must find it all out for himself. ²⁰⁰I don't care about the look of either of you, and I won't tell a word.”

²⁰¹He shuffled towards the door, but Athelney Jones got in front of him.

²⁰²“Wait a bit, my friend,” said he. ²⁰³“You have important information, and you must not walk off.

²⁰⁴We shall keep you, whether you like or not, until our friend returns.”

²⁰⁵The old man made a little run towards the door, but, as Athelney Jones put his broad back up against it, he recognized the uselessness of resistance.

²⁰⁶“Pretty sort o' treatment this!” he cried, stamping his stick. ²⁰⁷“I come here to see a gentleman, and you two, who I never saw in my life, seize me and treat me in this fashion!”

²⁰⁸“You will be none the worse,” I said. ²⁰⁹“We shall recompense you for the loss of your time. ²¹⁰Sit over here on the sofa, and you will not have long to wait.”

²¹¹He came across sullenly enough, and seated himself with his face resting on his hands. ²¹²Jones and I resumed our cigars and our talk. ²¹³Suddenly, however, Holmes's voice broke in upon us.

²¹⁴“I think that you might offer me a cigar too,” he said.

²¹⁵We both started in our chairs. ²¹⁶There was Holmes sitting close to us with an air of quiet amusement.

²¹⁷“Holmes!” I exclaimed. ²¹⁸“You here! ²¹⁹But where is the old man?”

²²⁰“Here is the old man,” said he, holding out a heap of white hair. ²²¹“Here he is,—wig, whiskers, eyebrows, and all. ²²²I thought my disguise was pretty good, but I hardly expected that it would stand that test.”

²²³“Ah, you rogue!” cried Jones, highly delighted. ²²⁴“You would have made an actor, and a rare one. ²²⁵You had the proper workhouse cough, and those weak legs of yours are worth ten pound a week. ²²⁶I thought I knew the glint of your eye, though. ²²⁷You didn't get away from us so easily, you see.”

²²⁸“I have been working in that get-up all day,” said he, lighting his cigar. ²²⁹“You see, a good many of the criminal classes begin to know me,—especially since our friend here took to publishing some of my cases: so I can only go on the war-path under some simple disguise like this. ²³⁰You got my wire?”

²³¹“Yes; that was what brought me here.”

²³²“How has your case prospered?”

²³³“It has all come to nothing. ²³⁴I have had to release two of my prisoners, and there is no evidence against the other two.”

²³⁵“Never mind. ²³⁶We shall give you two others in the place of them. ²³⁷But you must put yourself under my orders. ²³⁸You are welcome to all the official credit, but you must act on the line that I point out. ²³⁹Is that agreed?”

²⁴⁰“Entirely, if you will help me to the men.”

²⁴¹“Well, then, in the first place I shall want a fast police-boat—a steam launch—to be at the Westminster Stairs at seven o'clock.”

²⁴²“That is easily managed. ²⁴³There is always one about there; but I can step across the road and telephone to make sure.”

²⁴⁴“Then I shall want two stanch men, in case of resistance.”

²⁴⁵“There will be two or three in the boat. ²⁴⁶What else?”

²⁴⁷“When we secure the men we shall get the treasure. ²⁴⁸I think that it would be a pleasure to my friend here to take the box round to the young lady to whom half of it rightfully belongs. ²⁴⁹Let her be the first to open it.—²⁵⁰Eh, Watson?”

²⁵¹“It would be a great pleasure to me.”

²⁵²“Rather an irregular proceeding,” said Jones, shaking his head. ²⁵³“However, the whole thing is irregular, and I suppose we must wink at it. ²⁵⁴The treasure must afterwards be handed over to the authorities until after the official investigation.”

²⁵⁵“Certainly. ²⁵⁶That is easily managed. ²⁵⁷One other point. ²⁵⁸I should much like to have a few details about this matter from the lips of Jonathan Small himself. ²⁵⁹You know I like to work the detail of my cases out. ²⁶⁰There is no objection to my having an unofficial interview with him, either here in my rooms or elsewhere, as long as he is efficiently guarded?”

²⁶¹“Well, you are master of the situation. ²⁶²I have had no proof yet of the existence of this Jonathan Small. ²⁶³However, if you can catch him I don't see how I can refuse you an interview with him.”

²⁶⁴“That is understood, then?”

²⁶⁵“Perfectly. ²⁶⁶Is there anything else?”

²⁶⁷“Only that I insist upon your dining with us. ²⁶⁸It will be ready in half an hour. ²⁶⁹I have oysters and a brace of grouse, with something a little choice in white wines.—²⁷⁰Watson, you have never yet recognized my merits as a housekeeper.”

Chapter X.

The End of the Islander

¹Our meal was a merry one. ²Holmes could talk exceedingly well when he chose, and that night he did choose. ³He appeared to be in a state of nervous exaltation. ⁴I have never known him so brilliant. ⁵He spoke on a quick succession of subjects,—on miracle-plays, on medieval pottery, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the war-ships of the future,—handling each as though he had made a special study of it. ⁶His bright humor marked the reaction from his black depression of the preceding days. ⁷Athelney Jones proved to be a sociable soul in his hours of relaxation, and face his dinner with the air of a bon vivant. ⁸For myself, I felt elated at the thought that we were nearing the end of our task, and I caught something of Holmes's gaiety. ⁹None of us alluded during dinner to the cause which had brought us together.

¹⁰When the cloth was cleared, Holmes glanced at this watch, and filled up three glasses with port. ¹¹“One bumper,” said he, “to the success of our little expedition. ¹²And now it is high time we were off. ¹³Have you a pistol, Watson?”

¹⁴“I have my old service-revolver in my desk.”

¹⁵“You had best take it, then. ¹⁶It is well to be prepared. ¹⁷I see that the cab is at the door. ¹⁸I ordered it for half-past six.”

¹⁹It was a little past seven before we reached the Westminster wharf, and found our launch awaiting us. ²⁰Holmes eyed it critically.

²¹“Is there anything to mark it as a police-boat?”

²²“Yes,—that green lamp at the side.”

²³“Then take it off.”

²⁴The small change was made, we stepped on board, and the ropes were cast off. ²⁵Jones, Holmes, and I sat in the stern. ²⁶There was one man at the rudder, one to tend the engines, and two burly police-inspectors forward.

²⁷“Where to?” asked Jones.

²⁸“To the Tower. ²⁹Tell them to stop opposite Jacobson's Yard.”

³⁰Our craft was evidently a very fast one. ³¹We shot past the long lines of loaded barges as though they were stationary. ³²Holmes smiled with satisfaction as we overhauled a river steamer and left her behind us.

³³“We ought to be able to catch anything on the river,” he said.

³⁴“Well, hardly that. ³⁵But there are not many launches to beat us.”

³⁶“We shall have to catch the Aurora, and she has a name for being a clipper. ³⁷I will tell you how the land lies, Watson. ³⁸You recollect how annoyed I was at being balked by so small a thing?”

³⁹“Yes.”

⁴⁰“Well, I gave my mind a thorough rest by plunging into a chemical analysis. ⁴¹One of our greatest statesmen has said that a change of work is the best rest. ⁴²So it is. ⁴³When I had succeeded in dissolving the hydrocarbon which I was at work at, I came back to our problem of the Sholtos, and thought the

whole matter out again. ⁴⁴My boys had been up the river and down the river without result. ⁴⁵The launch was not at any landing-stage or wharf, nor had it returned. ⁴⁶Yet it could hardly have been scuttled to hide their traces,—though that always remained as a possible hypothesis if all else failed. ⁴⁷I knew this man Small had a certain degree of low cunning, but I did not think him capable of anything in the nature of delicate finesse. ⁴⁸That is usually a product of higher education. ⁴⁹I then reflected that since he had certainly been in London some time—as we had evidence that he maintained a continual watch over Pondicherry Lodge—he could hardly leave at a moment's notice, but would need some little time, if it were only a day, to arrange his affairs. ⁵⁰That was the balance of probability, at any rate."

⁵¹"It seems to me to be a little weak," said I. ⁵²"It is more probable that he had arranged his affairs before ever he set out upon his expedition."

⁵³"No, I hardly think so. ⁵⁴This lair of his would be too valuable a retreat in case of need for him to give it up until he was sure that he could do without it. ⁵⁵But a second consideration struck me. ⁵⁶Jonathan Small must have felt that the peculiar appearance of his companion, however much he may have top-coated him, would give rise to gossip, and possibly be associated with this Norwood tragedy. ⁵⁷He was quite sharp enough to see that. ⁵⁸They had started from their head-quarters under cover of darkness, and he would wish to get back before it was broad light. ⁵⁹Now, it was past three o'clock, according to Mrs. Smith, when they got the boat. ⁶⁰It would be quite bright, and people would be about in an hour or so. ⁶¹Therefore, I argued, they did not go very far. ⁶²They paid Smith well to hold his tongue, reserved his launch for the final escape, and hurried to their lodgings with the treasure-box. ⁶³In a couple of nights, when they had time to see what view the papers took, and whether there was any suspicion, they would make their way under cover of darkness to some ship at Gravesend or in the Downs, where no doubt they had already arranged for passages to America or the Colonies."

⁶⁴"But the launch? ⁶⁵They could not have taken that to their lodgings."

⁶⁶"Quite so. ⁶⁷I argued that the launch must be no great way off, in spite of its invisibility. ⁶⁸I then put myself in the place of Small, and looked at it as a man of his capacity would. ⁶⁹He would probably consider that to send back the launch or to keep it at a wharf would make pursuit easy if the police did happen to get on his track. ⁷⁰How, then, could he conceal the launch and yet have her at hand when wanted? ⁷¹I wondered what I should do myself if I were in his shoes. ⁷²I could only think of one way of doing it. ⁷³I might land the launch over to some boat-builder or repairer, with directions to make a trifling change in her. ⁷⁴She would then be removed to his shed or hard, and so be effectually concealed, while at the same time I could have her at a few hours' notice."

⁷⁵"That seems simple enough."

⁷⁶"It is just these very simple things which are extremely liable to be overlooked. ⁷⁷However, I determined to act on the idea. ⁷⁸I started at once in this harmless seaman's rig and inquired at all the yards down the river. ⁷⁹I drew blank at fifteen, but at the sixteenth—Jacobson's—I learned that the Aurora had been handed over to them two days ago by a wooden-legged man, with some trivial directions as to her rudder. ⁸⁰'There ain't naught amiss with her rudder,' said the foreman. ⁸¹'There she lies, with the red streaks.' ⁸²At that moment who should come down but Mordecai Smith, the missing owner? ⁸³He was rather the worse for liquor. ⁸⁴I should not, of course, have known him, but he bellowed out his name and the name of his launch. ⁸⁵'I want her to-night at eight o'clock,' said he,—'eight o'clock sharp, mind, for I have two gentlemen who won't be kept waiting.' ⁸⁶They had evidently paid him well, for he was very flush of money, chucking shillings about to the men. ⁸⁷I followed him some distance, but he subsided into an ale-house: so I went back to the yard, and, happening to pick up one of my boys on the way, I stationed him as a sentry over the launch. ⁸⁸He is to stand at water's edge and wave his handkerchief to us when they start. ⁸⁹We shall be lying off in the stream, and it will be a strange thing if we do not take men, treasure, and all."

⁹⁰“You have planned it all very neatly, whether they are the right men or not,” said Jones; “but if the affair were in my hands I should have had a body of police in Jacobson's Yard, and arrested them when they came down.”

⁹¹“Which would have been never. ⁹²This man Small is a pretty shrewd fellow. ⁹³He would send a scout on ahead, and if anything made him suspicious lie snug for another week.”

⁹⁴“But you might have stuck to Mordecai Smith, and so been led to their hiding-place,” said I.

⁹⁵“In that case I should have wasted my day. ⁹⁶I think that it is a hundred to one against Smith knowing where they live. ⁹⁷As long as he has liquor and good pay, why should he ask questions? ⁹⁸They send him messages what to do. ⁹⁹No, I thought over every possible course, and this is the best.”

¹⁰⁰While this conversation had been proceeding, we had been shooting the long series of bridges which span the Thames. ¹⁰¹As we passed the City the last rays of the sun were gilding the cross upon the summit of St. Paul's. ¹⁰²It was twilight before we reached the Tower.

¹⁰³“That is Jacobson's Yard,” said Holmes, pointing to a bristle of masts and rigging on the Surrey side. ¹⁰⁴“Cruise gently up and down here under cover of this string of lighters.” ¹⁰⁵He took a pair of night-glasses from his pocket and gazed some time at the shore. ¹⁰⁶“I see my sentry at his post,” he remarked, “but no sign of a handkerchief.”

¹⁰⁷“Suppose we go down-stream a short way and lie in wait for them,” said Jones, eagerly. ¹⁰⁸We were all eager by this time, even the policemen and stokers, who had a very vague idea of what was going forward.

¹⁰⁹“We have no right to take anything for granted,” Holmes answered. ¹¹⁰“It is certainly ten to one that they go down-stream, but we cannot be certain. ¹¹¹From this point we can see the entrance of the yard, and they can hardly see us. ¹¹²It will be a clear night and plenty of light. ¹¹³We must stay where we are. ¹¹⁴See how the folk swarm over yonder in the gaslight.”

¹¹⁵“They are coming from work in the yard.”

¹¹⁶“Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose every one has some little immortal spark concealed about him. ¹¹⁷You would not think it, to look at them. ¹¹⁸There is no a priori probability about it. ¹¹⁹A strange enigma is man!”

¹²⁰“Some one calls him a soul concealed in an animal,” I suggested.

¹²¹“Winwood Reade is good upon the subject,” said Holmes. ¹²²“He remarks that, while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. ¹²³You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. ¹²⁴Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. ¹²⁵So says the statistician. ¹²⁶But do I see a handkerchief? ¹²⁷Surely there is a white flutter over yonder.”

¹²⁸“Yes, it is your boy,” I cried. ¹²⁹“I can see him plainly.”

¹³⁰“And there is the Aurora,” exclaimed Holmes, “and going like the devil! ¹³¹Full speed ahead, engineer. ¹³²Make after that launch with the yellow light. ¹³³By heaven, I shall never forgive myself if she proves to have the heels of us!”

¹³⁴She had slipped unseen through the yard-entrance and passed behind two or three small craft, so that she had fairly got her speed up before we saw her. ¹³⁵Now she was flying down the stream, near in to the shore, going at a tremendous rate. ¹³⁶Jones looked gravely at her and shook his head.

¹³⁷“She is very fast,” he said. ¹³⁸“I doubt if we shall catch her.”

¹³⁹“We must catch her!” cried Holmes, between his teeth. ¹⁴⁰“Heap it on, stokers! ¹⁴¹Make her do all she can! ¹⁴²If we burn the boat we must have them!”

¹⁴³We were fairly after her now. ¹⁴⁴The furnaces roared, and the powerful engines whizzed and clanked, like a great metallic heart. ¹⁴⁵Her sharp, steep prow cut through the river-water and sent two rolling waves to right and to left of us. ¹⁴⁶With every throb of the engines we sprang and quivered like a living thing. ¹⁴⁷One great yellow lantern in our bows threw a long, flickering funnel of light in front of us. ¹⁴⁸Right ahead a dark blur upon the water showed where the Aurora lay, and the swirl of white foam behind her spoke of the pace at which she was going. ¹⁴⁹We flashed past barges, steamers, merchant-vessels, in and out, behind this one and round the other. ¹⁵⁰Voices hailed us out of the darkness, but still the Aurora thundered on, and still we followed close upon her track.

¹⁵¹“Pile it on, men, pile it on!” cried Holmes, looking down into the engine-room, while the fierce glow from below beat upon his eager, aquiline face. ¹⁵²“Get every pound of steam you can.”

¹⁵³“I think we gain a little,” said Jones, with his eyes on the Aurora.

¹⁵⁴“I am sure of it,” said I. ¹⁵⁵“We shall be up with her in a very few minutes.”

¹⁵⁶At that moment, however, as our evil fate would have it, a tug with three barges in tow blundered in between us. ¹⁵⁷It was only by putting our helm hard down that we avoided a collision, and before we could round them and recover our way the Aurora had gained a good two hundred yards. ¹⁵⁸She was still, however, well in view, and the murky uncertain twilight was setting into a clear starlit night. ¹⁵⁹Our boilers were strained to their utmost, and the frail shell vibrated and creaked with the fierce energy which was driving us along. ¹⁶⁰We had shot through the Pool, past the West India Docks, down the long Deptford Reach, and up again after rounding the Isle of Dogs. ¹⁶¹The dull blur in front of us resolved itself now clearly enough into the dainty Aurora. ¹⁶²Jones turned our search-light upon her, so that we could plainly see the figures upon her deck. ¹⁶³One man sat by the stern, with something black between his knees over which he stooped. ¹⁶⁴Beside him lay a dark mass which looked like a Newfoundland dog. ¹⁶⁵The boy held the tiller, while against the red glare of the furnace I could see old Smith, stripped to the waist, and shovelling coals for dear life. ¹⁶⁶They may have had some doubt at first as to whether we were really pursuing them, but now as we followed every winding and turning which they took there could no longer be any question about it. ¹⁶⁷At Greenwich we were about three hundred paces behind them. ¹⁶⁸At Blackwall we could not have been more than two hundred and fifty. ¹⁶⁹I have coursed many creatures in many countries during my checkered career, but never did sport give me such a wild thrill as this mad, flying man-hunt down the Thames. ¹⁷⁰Steadily we drew in upon them, yard by yard. ¹⁷¹In the silence of the night we could hear the panting and clanking of their machinery. ¹⁷²The man in the stern still crouched upon the deck, and his arms were moving as though he were busy, while every now and then he would look up and measure with a glance the distance which still separated us. ¹⁷³Nearer we came and nearer. ¹⁷⁴Jones yelled to them to stop. ¹⁷⁵We were not more than four boat's lengths behind them, both boats flying at a tremendous pace. ¹⁷⁶It was a clear reach of the river, with Barking Level upon one side and the melancholy Plumstead Marshes upon the other. ¹⁷⁷At our hail the man in the stern sprang up from the deck and shook his two clinched fists at us, cursing the while in a high, cracked voice. ¹⁷⁸He was a good-sized, powerful man, and as he stood poising himself with legs astride I could see that from the thigh downwards there was but a wooden stump upon the right side. ¹⁷⁹At the sound of his strident, angry cries there was movement in the huddled bundle upon the deck. ¹⁸⁰It straightened itself into a little black man—the smallest I have ever seen—with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair. ¹⁸¹Holmes had already drawn his revolver, and I whipped out mine at the sight of this savage, distorted creature. ¹⁸²He was wrapped in some sort of dark ulster or blanket, which left only his face exposed; but that face was enough to give a man a sleepless night. ¹⁸³Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. ¹⁸⁴His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with a half animal fury.

¹⁸⁵“Fire if he raises his hand,” said Holmes, quietly. ¹⁸⁶We were within a boat's-length by this time, and almost within touch of our quarry. ¹⁸⁷I can see the two of them now as they stood, the white man with his legs far apart, shrieking out curses, and the unhallowed dwarf with his hideous face, and his strong yellow teeth gnashing at us in the light of our lantern.

¹⁸⁸It was well that we had so clear a view of him. ¹⁸⁹Even as we looked he plucked out from under his covering a short, round piece of wood, like a school-ruler, and clapped it to his lips. ¹⁹⁰Our pistols rang out together. ¹⁹¹He whirled round, threw up his arms, and with a kind of choking cough fell sideways into the stream. ¹⁹²I caught one glimpse of his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters. ¹⁹³At the same moment the wooden-legged man threw himself upon the rudder and put it hard down, so that his boat made straight in for the southern bank, while we shot past her stern, only clearing her by a few feet. ¹⁹⁴We were round after her in an instant, but she was already nearly at the bank. ¹⁹⁵It was a wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide expanse of marsh-land, with pools of stagnant water and beds of decaying vegetation. ¹⁹⁶The launch with a dull thud ran up upon the mud-bank, with her bow in the air and her stern flush with the water. ¹⁹⁷The fugitive sprang out, but his stump instantly sank its whole length into the sodden soil. ¹⁹⁸In vain he struggled and writhed. ¹⁹⁹Not one step could he possibly take either forwards or backwards. ²⁰⁰He yelled in impotent rage, and kicked frantically into the mud with his other foot, but his struggles only bored his wooden pin the deeper into the sticky bank. ²⁰¹When we brought our launch alongside he was so firmly anchored that it was only by throwing the end of a rope over his shoulders that we were able to haul him out, and to drag him, like some evil fish, over our side. ²⁰²The two Smiths, father and son, sat sullenly in their launch, but came aboard meekly enough when commanded. ²⁰³The Aurora herself we hauled off and made fast to our stern. ²⁰⁴A solid iron chest of Indian workmanship stood upon the deck. ²⁰⁵This, there could be no question, was the same that had contained the ill-omened treasure of the Sholtos. ²⁰⁶There was no key, but it was of considerable weight, so we transferred it carefully to our own little cabin. ²⁰⁷As we steamed slowly up-stream again, we flashed our search-light in every direction, but there was no sign of the Islander. ²⁰⁸Somewhere in the dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange visitor to our shores.

²⁰⁹“See here,” said Holmes, pointing to the wooden hatchway. ²¹⁰“We were hardly quick enough with our pistols.” ²¹¹There, sure enough, just behind where we had been standing, stuck one of those murderous darts which we knew so well. ²¹²It must have whizzed between us at the instant that we fired. ²¹³Holmes smiled at it and shrugged his shoulders in his easy fashion, but I confess that it turned me sick to think of the horrible death which had passed so close to us that night.

Chapter XI.

The Great Agra Treasure

¹Our captive sat in the cabin opposite to the iron box which he had done so much and waited so long to gain. ²He was a sunburned, reckless-eyed fellow, with a net-work of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany features, which told of a hard, open-air life. ³There was a singular prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was not to be easily turned from his purpose. ⁴His age may have been fifty or thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was thickly shot with gray. ⁵His face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and aggressive chin gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression when moved to anger. ⁶He sat now with his handcuffed hands upon his lap, and his head sunk upon his breast, while he looked with his keen, twinkling eyes at the box which had been the cause of his ill-doings. ⁷It seemed to me that there was more sorrow than anger in his rigid and contained countenance. ⁸Once he looked up at me with a gleam of something like humour in his eyes.

⁹“Well, Jonathan Small,” said Holmes, lighting a cigar, “I am sorry that it has come to this.”

¹⁰“And so am I, sir,” he answered, frankly. ¹¹“I don't believe that I can swing over the job. ¹²I give you my word on the book that I never raised hand against Mr. Sholto. ¹³It was that little hell-hound Tonga who shot one of his cursed darts into him. ¹⁴I had no part in it, sir. ¹⁵I was as grieved as if it had been my blood-relation. ¹⁶I welted the little devil with the slack end of the rope for it, but it was done, and I could not undo it again.”

¹⁷“Have a cigar,” said Holmes; “and you had best take a pull out of my flask, for you are very wet. ¹⁸How could you expect so small and weak a man as this black fellow to overpower Mr. Sholto and hold him while you were climbing the rope?”

¹⁹“You seem to know as much about it as if you were there, sir. ²⁰The truth is that I hoped to find the room clear. ²¹I knew the habits of the house pretty well, and it was the time when Mr. Sholto usually went down to his supper. ²²I shall make no secret of the business. ²³The best defence that I can make is just the simple truth. ²⁴Now, if it had been the old major I would have swung for him with a light heart. ²⁵I would have thought no more of knifing him than of smoking this cigar. ²⁶But it's cursed hard that I should be lagged over this young Sholto, with whom I had no quarrel whatever.”

²⁷“You are under the charge of Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard. ²⁸He is going to bring you up to my rooms, and I shall ask you for a true account of the matter. ²⁹You must make a clean breast of it, for if you do I hope that I may be of use to you. ³⁰I think I can prove that the poison acts so quickly that the man was dead before ever you reached the room.”

³¹“That he was, sir. ³²I never got such a turn in my life as when I saw him grinning at me with his head on his shoulder as I climbed through the window. ³³It fairly shook me, sir. ³⁴I'd have half killed Tonga for it if he had not scrambled off. ³⁵That was how he came to leave his club, and some of his darts too, as he tells me, which I dare say helped to put you on our track; though how you kept on it is more than I can tell. ³⁶I don't feel no malice against you for it. ³⁷But it does seem a queer thing,” he added, with a bitter smile, “that I who have a fair claim to nigh upon half a million of money should spend the first half of my life building a breakwater in the Andamans, and am like to spend the other half digging drains at Dartmoor. ³⁸It was an evil day for me when first I clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who owned it. ³⁹To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life.”

⁴⁰At this moment Athelney Jones thrust his broad face and heavy shoulders into the tiny cabin. ⁴¹"Quite a family party," he remarked. ⁴²"I think I shall have a pull at that flask, Holmes. ⁴³Well, I think we may all congratulate each other. ⁴⁴Pity we didn't take the other alive; but there was no choice. ⁴⁵I say, Holmes, you must confess that you cut it rather fine. ⁴⁶It was all we could do to overhaul her."

⁴⁷"All is well that ends well," said Holmes. ⁴⁸"But I certainly did not know that the Aurora was such a clipper."

⁴⁹"Smith says she is one of the fastest launches on the river, and that if he had had another man to help him with the engines we should never have caught her. ⁵⁰He swears he knew nothing of this Norwood business."

⁵¹"Neither he did," cried our prisoner,—“not a word. ⁵²I chose his launch because I heard that she was a flier. ⁵³We told him nothing, but we paid him well, and he was to get something handsome if we reached our vessel, the Esmeralda, at Gravesend, outward bound for the Brazils."

⁵⁴"Well, if he has done no wrong we shall see that no wrong comes to him. ⁵⁵If we are pretty quick in catching our men, we are not so quick in condemning them." ⁵⁶It was amusing to notice how the consequential Jones was already beginning to give himself airs on the strength of the capture. ⁵⁷From the slight smile which played over Sherlock Holmes's face, I could see that the speech had not been lost upon him.

⁵⁸"We will be at Vauxhall Bridge presently," said Jones, "and shall land you, Dr. Watson, with the treasure-box. ⁵⁹I need hardly tell you that I am taking a very grave responsibility upon myself in doing this. ⁶⁰It is most irregular; but of course an agreement is an agreement. ⁶¹I must, however, as a matter of duty, send an inspector with you, since you have so valuable a charge. ⁶²You will drive, no doubt?"

⁶³"Yes, I shall drive."

⁶⁴"It is a pity there is no key, that we may make an inventory first. ⁶⁵You will have to break it open.

⁶⁶"Where is the key, my man?"

⁶⁷"At the bottom of the river," said Small, shortly.

⁶⁸"Hum! ⁶⁹There was no use your giving this unnecessary trouble. ⁷⁰We have had work enough already through you. ⁷¹However, doctor, I need not warn you to be careful. ⁷²Bring the box back with you to the Baker Street rooms. ⁷³You will find us there, on our way to the station."

⁷⁴They landed me at Vauxhall, with my heavy iron box, and with a bluff, genial inspector as my companion. ⁷⁵A quarter of an hour's drive brought us to Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. ⁷⁶The servant seemed surprised at so late a visitor. ⁷⁷Mrs. Cecil Forrester was out for the evening, she explained, and likely to be very late. ⁷⁸Miss Morstan, however, was in the drawing-room: so to the drawing-room I went, box in hand, leaving the obliging inspector in the cab.

⁷⁹She was seated by the open window, dressed in some sort of white diaphanous material, with a little touch of scarlet at the neck and waist. ⁸⁰The soft light of a shaded lamp fell upon her as she leaned back in the basket chair, playing over her sweet, grave face, and tinting with a dull, metallic sparkle the rich coils of her luxuriant hair. ⁸¹One white arm and hand drooped over the side of the chair, and her whole pose and figure spoke of an absorbing melancholy. ⁸²At the sound of my foot-fall she sprang to her feet, however, and a bright flush of surprise and of pleasure colored her pale cheeks.

⁸³"I heard a cab drive up," she said. ⁸⁴"I thought that Mrs. Forrester had come back very early, but I never dreamed that it might be you. ⁸⁵What news have you brought me?"

⁸⁶“I have brought something better than news,” said I, putting down the box upon the table and speaking jovially and boisterously, though my heart was heavy within me. ⁸⁷“I have brought you something which is worth all the news in the world. ⁸⁸I have brought you a fortune.”

⁸⁹She glanced at iron box. ⁹⁰“Is that the treasure, then?” she asked, coolly enough.

⁹¹“Yes, this is the great Agra treasure. ⁹²Half of it is yours and half is Thaddeus Sholto's. ⁹³You will have a couple of hundred thousand each. ⁹⁴Think of that! ⁹⁵An annuity of ten thousand pounds. ⁹⁶There will be few richer young ladies in England. ⁹⁷Is it not glorious?”

⁹⁸I think that I must have been rather overacting my delight, and that she detected a hollow ring in my congratulations, for I saw her eyebrows rise a little, and she glanced at me curiously.

⁹⁹“If I have it,” said she, “I owe it to you.”

¹⁰⁰“No, no,” I answered, “not to me, but to my friend Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁰¹With all the will in the world, I could never have followed up a clue which has taxed even his analytical genius. ¹⁰²As it was, we very nearly lost it at the last moment.”

¹⁰³“Pray sit down and tell me all about it, Dr. Watson,” said she.

¹⁰⁴I narrated briefly what had occurred since I had seen her last,—Holmes's new method of search, the discovery of the Aurora, the appearance of Athelney Jones, our expedition in the evening, and the wild chase down the Thames. ¹⁰⁵She listened with parted lips and shining eyes to my recital of our adventures. ¹⁰⁶When I spoke of the dart which had so narrowly missed us, she turned so white that I feared that she was about to faint.

¹⁰⁷“It is nothing,” she said, as I hastened to pour her out some water. ¹⁰⁸“I am all right again. ¹⁰⁹It was a shock to me to hear that I had placed my friends in such horrible peril.”

¹¹⁰“That is all over,” I answered. ¹¹¹“It was nothing. ¹¹²I will tell you no more gloomy details. ¹¹³Let us turn to something brighter. ¹¹⁴There is the treasure. ¹¹⁵What could be brighter than that? ¹¹⁶I got leave to bring it with me, thinking that it would interest you to be the first to see it.”

¹¹⁷“It would be of the greatest interest to me,” she said. ¹¹⁸There was no eagerness in her voice, however. ¹¹⁹It had struck her, doubtless, that it might seem ungracious upon her part to be indifferent to a prize which had cost so much to win.

¹²⁰“What a pretty box!” she said, stooping over it. ¹²¹“This is Indian work, I suppose?”

¹²²“Yes; it is Benares metal-work.”

¹²³“And so heavy!” she exclaimed, trying to raise it. ¹²⁴“The box alone must be of some value. ¹²⁵Where is the key?”

¹²⁶“Small threw it into the Thames,” I answered. ¹²⁷“I must borrow Mrs. Forrester's poker.” ¹²⁸There was in the front a thick and broad hasp, wrought in the image of a sitting Buddha. ¹²⁹Under this I thrust the end of the poker and twisted it outward as a lever. ¹³⁰The hasp sprang open with a loud snap. ¹³¹With trembling fingers I flung back the lid. ¹³²We both stood gazing in astonishment. ¹³³The box was empty!

¹³⁴No wonder that it was heavy. ¹³⁵The iron-work was two-thirds of an inch thick all round. ¹³⁶It was massive, well made, and solid, like a chest constructed to carry things of great price, but not one shred or crumb of metal or jewelry lay within it. ¹³⁷It was absolutely and completely empty.

¹³⁸“The treasure is lost,” said Miss Morstan, calmly.

¹³⁹As I listened to the words and realized what they meant, a great shadow seemed to pass from my soul. ¹⁴⁰I did not know how this Agra treasure had weighed me down, until now that it was finally

removed. ¹⁴¹It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realize nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us. ¹⁴²“Thank God!” I ejaculated from my very heart.

¹⁴³She looked at me with a quick, questioning smile. ¹⁴⁴“Why do you say that?” she asked.

¹⁴⁵“Because you are within my reach again,” I said, taking her hand. ¹⁴⁶She did not withdraw it.

¹⁴⁷“Because I love you, Mary, as truly as ever a man loved a woman. ¹⁴⁸Because this treasure, these riches, sealed my lips. ¹⁴⁹Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you. ¹⁵⁰That is why I said, ‘Thank God.’”

¹⁵¹“Then I say, ‘Thank God,’ too,” she whispered, as I drew her to my side. ¹⁵²Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one.

Chapter XII.

The Strange Story of Jonathan Small

¹A very patient man was that inspector in the cab, for it was a weary time before I rejoined him. ²His face clouded over when I showed him the empty box.

³“There goes the reward!” said he, gloomily. ⁴“Where there is no money there is no pay. ⁵This night's work would have been worth a tanner each to Sam Brown and me if the treasure had been there.”

⁶“Mr. Thaddeus Sholto is a rich man,” I said. ⁷“He will see that you are rewarded, treasure or no.”

⁸The inspector shook his head despondently, however. ⁹“It's a bad job,” he repeated; “and so Mr. Athelney Jones will think.”

¹⁰His forecast proved to be correct, for the detective looked blank enough when I got to Baker Street and showed him the empty box. ¹¹They had only just arrived, Holmes, the prisoner, and he, for they had changed their plans so far as to report themselves at a station upon the way. ¹²My companion lounged in his arm-chair with his usual listless expression, while Small sat stolidly opposite to him with his wooden leg cocked over his sound one. ¹³As I exhibited the empty box he leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud.

¹⁴“This is your doing, Small,” said Athelney Jones, angrily.

¹⁵“Yes, I have put it away where you shall never lay hand upon it,” he cried, exultantly. ¹⁶“It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot I'll take darned good care that no one else does. ¹⁷I tell you that no living man has any right to it, unless it is three men who are in the Andaman convict-barracks and myself. ¹⁸I know now that I cannot have the use of it, and I know that they cannot. ¹⁹I have acted all through for them as much as for myself. ²⁰It's been the sign of four with us always. ²¹Well I know that they would have had me do just what I have done, and throw the treasure into the Thames rather than let it go to kith or kin of Sholto or of Morstan. ²²It was not to make them rich that we did for Achmet. You'll find the treasure where the key is, and where little Tonga is. ²³When I saw that your launch must catch us, I put the loot away in a safe place. ²⁴There are no rupees for you this journey.”

²⁵“You are deceiving us, Small,” said Athelney Jones, sternly. ²⁶“If you had wished to throw the treasure into the Thames it would have been easier for you to have thrown box and all.”

²⁷“Easier for me to throw, and easier for you to recover,” he answered, with a shrewd, sidelong look. ²⁸“The man that was clever enough to hunt me down is clever enough to pick an iron box from the bottom of a river. ²⁹Now that they are scattered over five miles or so, it may be a harder job. ³⁰It went to my heart to do it, though. ³¹I was half mad when you came up with us. ³²However, there's no good grieving over it. ³³I've had ups in my life, and I've had downs, but I've learned not to cry over spilled milk.”

³⁴“This is a very serious matter, Small,” said the detective. ³⁵“If you had helped justice, instead of thwarting it in this way, you would have had a better chance at your trial.”

³⁶“Justice!” snarled the ex-convict. ³⁷“A pretty justice! ³⁸Whose loot is this, if it is not ours? ³⁹Where is the justice that I should give it up to those who have never earned it? ⁴⁰Look how I have earned it! ⁴¹Twenty long years in that fever-ridden swamp, all day at work under the mangrove-tree, all night chained up in the filthy convict-huts, bitten by mosquitoes, racked with ague, bullied by every cursed black-faced policeman who loved to take it out of a white man. ⁴²That was how I earned the Agra treasure; and you talk to me of justice because I cannot bear to feel that I have paid this price only that

another may enjoy it! ⁴³I would rather swing a score of times, or have one of Tonga's darts in my hide, than live in a convict's cell and feel that another man is at his ease in a palace with the money that should be mine." ⁴⁴Small had dropped his mask of stoicism, and all this came out in a wild whirl of words, while his eyes blazed, and the handcuffs clanked together with the impassioned movement of his hands. ⁴⁵I could understand, as I saw the fury and the passion of the man, that it was no groundless or unnatural terror which had possessed Major Sholto when he first learned that the injured convict was upon his track.

⁴⁶"You forget that we know nothing of all this," said Holmes quietly. ⁴⁷"We have not heard your story, and we cannot tell how far justice may originally have been on your side."

⁴⁸"Well, sir, you have been very fair-spoken to me, though I can see that I have you to thank that I have these bracelets upon my wrists. ⁴⁹Still, I bear no grudge for that. ⁵⁰It is all fair and above-board. ⁵¹If you want to hear my story I have no wish to hold it back. ⁵²What I say to you is God's truth, every word of it. ⁵³Thank you; you can put the glass beside me here, and I'll put my lips to it if I am dry.

⁵⁴"I am a Worcestershire man myself,—born near Pershore. ⁵⁵I dare say you would find a heap of Smalls living there now if you were to look. ⁵⁶I have often thought of taking a look round there, but the truth is that I was never much of a credit to the family, and I doubt if they would be so very glad to see me. ⁵⁷They were all steady, chapel-going folk, small farmers, well known and respected over the countryside, while I was always a bit of a rover. ⁵⁸At last, however, when I was about eighteen, I gave them no more trouble, for I got into a mess over a girl, and could only get out of it again by taking the queen's shilling and joining the 3d Buffs, which was just starting for India.

⁵⁹"I wasn't destined to do much soldiering, however. ⁶⁰I had just got past the goose-step, and learned to handle my musket, when I was fool enough to go swimming in the Ganges. ⁶¹Luckily for me, my company sergeant, John Holder, was in the water at the same time, and he was one of the finest swimmers in the service. ⁶²A crocodile took me, just as I was half-way across, and nipped off my right leg as clean as a surgeon could have done it, just above the knee. ⁶³What with the shock and the loss of blood, I fainted, and should have drowned if Holder had not caught hold of me and paddled for the bank. ⁶⁴I was five months in hospital over it, and when at last I was able to limp out of it with this timber toe strapped to my stump I found myself invalided out of the army and unfitted for any active occupation.

⁶⁵"I was, as you can imagine, pretty down on my luck at this time, for I was a useless cripple though not yet in my twentieth year. ⁶⁶However, my misfortune soon proved to be a blessing in disguise. ⁶⁷A man named Abelwhite, who had come out there as an indigo-planter, wanted an overseer to look after his coolies and keep them up to their work. ⁶⁸He happened to be a friend of our colonel's, who had taken an interest in me since the accident. ⁶⁹To make a long story short, the colonel recommended me strongly for the post and, as the work was mostly to be done on horseback, my leg was no great obstacle, for I had enough knee left to keep good grip on the saddle. ⁷⁰What I had to do was to ride over the plantation, to keep an eye on the men as they worked, and to report the idlers. ⁷¹The pay was fair, I had comfortable quarters, and altogether I was content to spend the remainder of my life in indigo-planting. ⁷²Mr. Abelwhite was a kind man, and he would often drop into my little shanty and smoke a pipe with me, for white folk out there feel their hearts warm to each other as they never do here at home.

⁷³"Well, I was never in luck's way long. ⁷⁴Suddenly, without a note of warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. ⁷⁵One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell. ⁷⁶Of course you know all about it, gentlemen,—a deal more than I do, very like, since reading is not in my line. ⁷⁷I only know what I saw with my own eyes. ⁷⁸Our plantation was at a place called Muttra, near the border of the Northwest Provinces. ⁷⁹Night after night the whole sky was alight with the burning bungalows, and day after day we had small companies of Europeans passing through our estate with their wives and

children, on their way to Agra, where were the nearest troops. ⁸⁰Mr. Abelwhite was an obstinate man. ⁸¹He had it in his head that the affair had been exaggerated, and that it would blow over as suddenly as it had sprung up. ⁸²There he sat on his veranda, drinking whiskey-pegs and smoking cheroots, while the country was in a blaze about him. ⁸³Of course we stuck by him, I and Dawson, who, with his wife, used to do the book-work and the managing. ⁸⁴Well, one fine day the crash came. ⁸⁵I had been away on a distant plantation, and was riding slowly home in the evening, when my eye fell upon something all huddled together at the bottom of a steep nullah. ⁸⁶I rode down to see what it was, and the cold struck through my heart when I found it was Dawson's wife, all cut into ribbons, and half eaten by jackals and native dogs. ⁸⁷A little further up the road Dawson himself was lying on his face, quite dead, with an empty revolver in his hand and four Sepoys lying across each other in front of him. ⁸⁸I reined up my horse, wondering which way I should turn, but at that moment I saw thick smoke curling up from Abelwhite's bungalow and the flames beginning to burst through the roof. ⁸⁹I knew then that I could do my employer no good, but would only throw my own life away if I meddled in the matter. ⁹⁰From where I stood I could see hundreds of the black fiends, with their red coats still on their backs, dancing and howling round the burning house. ⁹¹Some of them pointed at me, and a couple of bullets sang past my head; so I broke away across the paddy-fields, and found myself late at night safe within the walls at Agra.

⁹²“As it proved, however, there was no great safety there, either. ⁹³The whole country was up like a swarm of bees. ⁹⁴Wherever the English could collect in little bands they held just the ground that their guns commanded. ⁹⁵Everywhere else they were helpless fugitives. ⁹⁶It was a fight of the millions against the hundreds; and the cruellest part of it was that these men that we fought against, foot, horse, and gunners, were our own picked troops, whom we had taught and trained, handling our own weapons, and blowing our own bugle-calls. ⁹⁷At Agra there were the 3d Bengal Fusiliers, some Sikhs, two troops of horse, and a battery of artillery. ⁹⁸A volunteer corps of clerks and merchants had been formed, and this I joined, wooden leg and all. ⁹⁹We went out to meet the rebels at Shahgunge early in July, and we beat them back for a time, but our powder gave out, and we had to fall back upon the city. ¹⁰⁰Nothing but the worst news came to us from every side,—which is not to be wondered at, for if you look at the map you will see that we were right in the heart of it. ¹⁰¹Lucknow is rather better than a hundred miles to the east, and Cawnpore about as far to the south. ¹⁰²From every point on the compass there was nothing but torture and murder and outrage.

¹⁰³“The city of Agra is a great place, swarming with fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers of all sorts. ¹⁰⁴Our handful of men were lost among the narrow, winding streets. ¹⁰⁵Our leader moved across the river, therefore, and took up his position in the old fort at Agra. ¹⁰⁶I don't know if any of you gentlemen have ever read or heard anything of that old fort. ¹⁰⁷It is a very queer place,—the queerest that ever I was in, and I have been in some rum corners, too. ¹⁰⁸First of all, it is enormous in size. ¹⁰⁹I should think that the enclosure must be acres and acres. ¹¹⁰There is a modern part, which took all our garrison, women, children, stores, and everything else, with plenty of room over. ¹¹¹But the modern part is nothing like the size of the old quarter, where nobody goes, and which is given over to the scorpions and the centipedes. ¹¹²It is all full of great deserted halls, and winding passages, and long corridors twisting in and out, so that it is easy enough for folk to get lost in it. ¹¹³For this reason it was seldom that any one went into it, though now and again a party with torches might go exploring.

¹¹⁴“The river washes along the front of the old fort, and so protects it, but on the sides and behind there are many doors, and these had to be guarded, of course, in the old quarter as well as in that which was actually held by our troops. ¹¹⁵We were short-handed, with hardly men enough to man the angles of the building and to serve the guns. ¹¹⁶It was impossible for us, therefore, to station a strong guard at every one of the innumerable gates. ¹¹⁷What we did was to organize a central guard-house in the middle of the fort, and to leave each gate under the charge of one white man and two or three natives. ¹¹⁸I was selected to take charge during certain hours of the night of a small isolated door upon the southwest side of the building. ¹¹⁹Two Sikh troopers were placed under my command, and I was instructed if

anything went wrong to fire my musket, when I might rely upon help coming at once from the central guard. ¹²⁰As the guard was a good two hundred paces away, however, and as the space between was cut up into a labyrinth of passages and corridors, I had great doubts as to whether they could arrive in time to be of any use in case of an actual attack.

¹²¹“Well, I was pretty proud at having this small command given me, since I was a raw recruit, and a game-legged one at that. ¹²²For two nights I kept the watch with my Punjaubees. They were tall, fierce-looking chaps, Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan by name, both old fighting-men who had borne arms against us at Chilian-wallah. ¹²³They could talk English pretty well, but I could get little out of them. ¹²⁴They preferred to stand together and jabber all night in their queer Sikh lingo. ¹²⁵For myself, I used to stand outside the gate-way, looking down on the broad, winding river and on the twinkling lights of the great city. ¹²⁶The beating of drums, the rattle of tomtoms, and the yells and howls of the rebels, drunk with opium and with bang, were enough to remind us all night of our dangerous neighbors across the stream. ¹²⁷Every two hours the officer of the night used to come round to all the posts, to make sure that all was well.

¹²⁸“The third night of my watch was dark and dirty, with a small, driving rain. ¹²⁹It was dreary work standing in the gate-way hour after hour in such weather. ¹³⁰I tried again and again to make my Sikhs talk, but without much success. ¹³¹At two in the morning the rounds passed, and broke for a moment the weariness of the night. ¹³²Finding that my companions would not be led into conversation, I took out my pipe, and laid down my musket to strike the match. ¹³³In an instant the two Sikhs were upon me. ¹³⁴One of them snatched my firelock up and levelled it at my head, while the other held a great knife to my throat and swore between his teeth that he would plunge it into me if I moved a step.

¹³⁵“My first thought was that these fellows were in league with the rebels, and that this was the beginning of an assault. ¹³⁶If our door were in the hands of the Sepoys the place must fall, and the women and children be treated as they were in Cawnpore. ¹³⁷Maybe you gentlemen think that I am just making out a case for myself, but I give you my word that when I thought of that, though I felt the point of the knife at my throat, I opened my mouth with the intention of giving a scream, if it was my last one, which might alarm the main guard. ¹³⁸The man who held me seemed to know my thoughts; for, even as I braced myself to it, he whispered, ‘Don’t make a noise. ¹³⁹The fort is safe enough. ¹⁴⁰There are no rebel dogs on this side of the river.’ ¹⁴¹There was the ring of truth in what he said, and I knew that if I raised my voice I was a dead man. ¹⁴²I could read it in the fellow’s brown eyes. ¹⁴³I waited, therefore, in silence, to see what it was that they wanted from me.

¹⁴⁴“Listen to me, Sahib,’ said the taller and fiercer of the pair, the one whom they called Abdullah Khan. ¹⁴⁵‘You must either be with us now or you must be silenced forever. ¹⁴⁶The thing is too great a one for us to hesitate. ¹⁴⁷Either you are heart and soul with us on your oath on the cross of the Christians, or your body this night shall be thrown into the ditch and we shall pass over to our brothers in the rebel army. ¹⁴⁸There is no middle way. ¹⁴⁹Which is it to be, death or life? ¹⁵⁰We can only give you three minutes to decide, for the time is passing, and all must be done before the rounds come again.’

¹⁵¹“How can I decide?’ said I. ¹⁵²‘You have not told me what you want of me. ¹⁵³But I tell you now that if it is anything against the safety of the fort I will have no truck with it, so you can drive home your knife and welcome.’

¹⁵⁴“It is nothing against the fort,’ said he. ¹⁵⁵‘We only ask you to do that which your countrymen come to this land for. ¹⁵⁶We ask you to be rich. ¹⁵⁷If you will be one of us this night, we will swear to you upon the naked knife, and by the threefold oath which no Sikh was ever known to break, that you shall have your fair share of the loot. ¹⁵⁸A quarter of the treasure shall be yours. ¹⁵⁹We can say no fairer.’

¹⁶⁰“But what is the treasure, then?’ I asked. ¹⁶¹‘I am as ready to be rich as you can be, if you will but show me how it can be done.’

¹⁶²“‘You will swear, then,’ said he, ‘by the bones of your father, by the honor of your mother, by the cross of your faith, to raise no hand and speak no word against us, either now or afterwards?’

¹⁶³“‘I will swear it,’ I answered, ‘provided that the fort is not endangered.’

¹⁶⁴“‘Then my comrade and I will swear that you shall have a quarter of the treasure which shall be equally divided among the four of us.’

¹⁶⁵“‘There are but three,’ said I.

¹⁶⁶“‘No; Dost Akbar must have his share. ¹⁶⁷We can tell the tale to you while we await them. ¹⁶⁸Do you stand at the gate, Mahomet Singh, and give notice of their coming. ¹⁶⁹The thing stands thus, Sahib, and I tell it to you because I know that an oath is binding upon a Feringhee, and that we may trust you. ¹⁷⁰Had you been a lying Hindoo, though you had sworn by all the gods in their false temples, your blood would have been upon the knife, and your body in the water. ¹⁷¹But the Sikh knows the Englishman, and the Englishman knows the Sikh. ¹⁷²Hearken, then, to what I have to say.

¹⁷³“‘There is a rajah in the northern provinces who has much wealth, though his lands are small. ¹⁷⁴Much has come to him from his father, and more still he has set by himself, for he is of a low nature and hoards his gold rather than spend it. ¹⁷⁵When the troubles broke out he would be friends both with the lion and the tiger,—with the Sepoy and with the Company’s raj. ¹⁷⁶Soon, however, it seemed to him that the white men’s day was come, for through all the land he could hear of nothing but of their death and their overthrow. ¹⁷⁷Yet, being a careful man, he made such plans that, come what might, half at least of his treasure should be left to him. ¹⁷⁸That which was in gold and silver he kept by him in the vaults of his palace, but the most precious stones and the choicest pearls that he had he put in an iron box, and sent it by a trusty servant who, under the guise of a merchant, should take it to the fort at Agra, there to lie until the land is at peace. ¹⁷⁹Thus, if the rebels won he would have his money, but if the Company conquered his jewels would be saved to him. ¹⁸⁰Having thus divided his hoard, he threw himself into the cause of the Sepoys, since they were strong upon his borders. ¹⁸¹By doing this, mark you, Sahib, his property becomes the due of those who have been true to their salt.

¹⁸²“‘This pretended merchant, who travels under the name of Achmet, is now in the city of Agra, and desires to gain his way into the fort. ¹⁸³He has with him as travelling-companion my foster-brother Dost Akbar, who knows his secret. ¹⁸⁴Dost Akbar has promised this night to lead him to a side-postern of the fort, and has chosen this one for his purpose. ¹⁸⁵Here he will come presently, and here he will find Mahomet Singh and myself awaiting him. ¹⁸⁶The place is lonely, and none shall know of his coming. ¹⁸⁷The world shall know of the merchant Achmet no more, but the great treasure of the rajah shall be divided among us. ¹⁸⁸What say you to it, Sahib?’

¹⁸⁹“‘In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and a sacred thing; but it is very different when there is fire and blood all round you and you have been used to meeting death at every turn. ¹⁹⁰Whether Achmet the merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I might do in the old country with it, and how my folk would stare when they saw their ne’er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold moidores. ¹⁹¹I had, therefore, already made up my mind. ¹⁹²Abdullah Khan, however, thinking that I hesitated, pressed the matter more closely.

¹⁹³“‘Consider, Sahib,’ said he, ‘that if this man is taken by the commandant he will be hung or shot, and his jewels taken by the government, so that no man will be a rupee the better for them. ¹⁹⁴Now, since we do the taking of him, why should we not do the rest as well? ¹⁹⁵The jewels will be as well with us as in the Company’s coffers. ¹⁹⁶There will be enough to make every one of us rich men and great chiefs. ¹⁹⁷No one can know about the matter, for here we are cut off from all men. ¹⁹⁸What could be better for the purpose? ¹⁹⁹Say again, then, Sahib, whether you are with us, or if we must look upon you as an enemy.’

²⁰⁰“‘I am with you heart and soul,’ said I.

²⁰¹“‘It is well,’ he answered, handing me back my firelock. ²⁰²‘You see that we trust you, for your word, like ours, is not to be broken. ²⁰³We have now only to wait for my brother and the merchant.’

²⁰⁴“‘Does your brother know, then, of what you will do?’ I asked.

²⁰⁵“‘The plan is his. ²⁰⁶He has devised it. ²⁰⁷We will go to the gate and share the watch with Mahomet Singh.’

²⁰⁸“The rain was still falling steadily, for it was just the beginning of the wet season. ²⁰⁹Brown, heavy clouds were drifting across the sky, and it was hard to see more than a stone-cast. ²¹⁰A deep moat lay in front of our door, but the water was in places nearly dried up, and it could easily be crossed. ²¹¹It was strange to me to be standing there with those two wild Punjaubees waiting for the man who was coming to his death.

²¹²“Suddenly my eye caught the glint of a shaded lantern at the other side of the moat. ²¹³It vanished among the mound-heaps, and then appeared again coming slowly in our direction.

²¹⁴“‘Here they are!’ I exclaimed.

²¹⁵“‘You will challenge him, Sahib, as usual,’ whispered Abdullah. ²¹⁶‘Give him no cause for fear. ²¹⁷Send us in with him, and we shall do the rest while you stay here on guard. ²¹⁸Have the lantern ready to uncover, that we may be sure that it is indeed the man.’

²¹⁹“The light had flickered onwards, now stopping and now advancing, until I could see two dark figures upon the other side of the moat. ²²⁰I let them scramble down the sloping bank, splash through the mire, and climb half-way up to the gate, before I challenged them.

²²¹“‘Who goes there?’ said I, in a subdued voice.

²²²“‘Friends,’ came the answer. ²²³I uncovered my lantern and threw a flood of light upon them. ²²⁴The first was an enormous Sikh, with a black beard which swept nearly down to his cummerbund. ²²⁵Outside of a show I have never seen so tall a man. ²²⁶The other was a little, fat, round fellow, with a great yellow turban, and a bundle in his hand, done up in a shawl. ²²⁷He seemed to be all in a quiver with fear, for his hands twitched as if he had the ague, and his head kept turning to left and right with two bright little twinkling eyes, like a mouse when he ventures out from his hole. ²²⁸It gave me the chills to think of killing him, but I thought of the treasure, and my heart set as hard as a flint within me. ²²⁹When he saw my white face he gave a little chirrup of joy and came running up towards me.

²³⁰“‘Your protection, Sahib,’ he panted,—‘your protection for the unhappy merchant Achmet. ²³¹I have travelled across Rajpootana that I might seek the shelter of the fort at Agra. ²³²I have been robbed and beaten and abused because I have been the friend of the Company. ²³³It is a blessed night this when I am once more in safety,—I and my poor possessions.’

²³⁴“‘What have you in the bundle?’ I asked.

²³⁵“‘An iron box,’ he answered, ‘which contains one or two little family matters which are of no value to others, but which I should be sorry to lose. ²³⁶Yet I am not a beggar; and I shall reward you, young Sahib, and your governor also, if he will give me the shelter I ask.’

²³⁷“I could not trust myself to speak longer with the man. ²³⁸The more I looked at his fat, frightened face, the harder did it seem that we should slay him in cold blood. ²³⁹It was best to get it over.

²⁴⁰“‘Take him to the main guard,’ said I. ²⁴¹The two Sikhs closed in upon him on each side, and the giant walked behind, while they marched in through the dark gate-way. ²⁴²Never was a man so compassed round with death. ²⁴³I remained at the gate-way with the lantern.

²⁴⁴“I could hear the measured tramp of their footsteps sounding through the lonely corridors. ²⁴⁵Suddenly it ceased, and I heard voices, and a scuffle, with the sound of blows. ²⁴⁶A moment later there came, to my horror, a rush of footsteps coming in my direction, with the loud breathing of a running man. ²⁴⁷I turned my lantern down the long, straight passage, and there was the fat man, running like the wind, with a smear of blood across his face, and close at his heels, bounding like a tiger, the great black-bearded Sikh, with a knife flashing in his hand. ²⁴⁸I have never seen a man run so fast as that little merchant. ²⁴⁹He was gaining on the Sikh, and I could see that if he once passed me and got to the open air he would save himself yet. ²⁵⁰My heart softened to him, but again the thought of his treasure turned me hard and bitter. ²⁵¹I cast my firelock between his legs as he raced past, and he rolled twice over like a shot rabbit. ²⁵²Ere he could stagger to his feet the Sikh was upon him, and buried his knife twice in his side. ²⁵³The man never uttered moan nor moved muscle, but lay where he had fallen. ²⁵⁴I think myself that he may have broken his neck with the fall. ²⁵⁵You see, gentlemen, that I am keeping my promise. ²⁵⁶I am telling you every work of the business just exactly as it happened, whether it is in my favor or not.”

²⁵⁷He stopped, and held out his manacled hands for the whiskey-and-water which Holmes had brewed for him. ²⁵⁸For myself, I confess that I had now conceived the utmost horror of the man, not only for this cold-blooded business in which he had been concerned, but even more for the somewhat flippant and careless way in which he narrated it. ²⁵⁹Whatever punishment was in store for him, I felt that he might expect no sympathy from me. ²⁶⁰Sherlock Holmes and Jones sat with their hands upon their knees, deeply interested in the story, but with the same disgust written upon their faces. ²⁶¹He may have observed it, for there was a touch of defiance in his voice and manner as he proceeded.

²⁶²“It was all very bad, no doubt,” said he. ²⁶³“I should like to know how many fellows in my shoes would have refused a share of this loot when they knew that they would have their throats cut for their pains. ²⁶⁴Besides, it was my life or his when once he was in the fort. ²⁶⁵If he had got out, the whole business would come to light, and I should have been court-martialled and shot as likely as not; for people were not very lenient at a time like that.”

²⁶⁶“Go on with your story,” said Holmes, shortly.

²⁶⁷“Well, we carried him in, Abdullah, Akbar, and I. ²⁶⁸A fine weight he was, too, for all that he was so short. ²⁶⁹Mahomet Singh was left to guard the door. ²⁷⁰We took him to a place which the Sikhs had already prepared. ²⁷¹It was some distance off, where a winding passage leads to a great empty hall, the brick walls of which were all crumbling to pieces. ²⁷²The earth floor had sunk in at one place, making a natural grave, so we left Achmet the merchant there, having first covered him over with loose bricks. ²⁷³This done, we all went back to the treasure.

²⁷⁴“It lay where he had dropped it when he was first attacked. ²⁷⁵The box was the same which now lies open upon your table. ²⁷⁶A key was hung by a silken cord to that carved handle upon the top. ²⁷⁷We opened it, and the light of the lantern gleamed upon a collection of gems such as I have read of and thought about when I was a little lad at Pershore. ²⁷⁸It was blinding to look upon them. ²⁷⁹When we had feasted our eyes we took them all out and made a list of them. ²⁸⁰There were one hundred and forty-three diamonds of the first water, including one which has been called, I believe, ‘the Great Mogul’ and is said to be the second largest stone in existence. ²⁸¹Then there were ninety-seven very fine emeralds, and one hundred and seventy rubies, some of which, however, were small. ²⁸²There were forty carbuncles, two hundred and ten sapphires, sixty-one agates, and a great quantity of beryls, onyxes, cats'-eyes, turquoises, and other stones, the very names of which I did not know at the time, though I have become more familiar with them since. ²⁸³Besides this, there were nearly three hundred very fine pearls, twelve of which were set in a gold coronet. ²⁸⁴By the way, these last had been taken out of the chest and were not there when I recovered it.

²⁸⁵“After we had counted our treasures we put them back into the chest and carried them to the gateway to show them to Mahomet Singh. ²⁸⁶Then we solemnly renewed our oath to stand by each other and be true to our secret. ²⁸⁷We agreed to conceal our loot in a safe place until the country should be at peace again, and then to divide it equally among ourselves. ²⁸⁸There was no use dividing it at present, for if gems of such value were found upon us it would cause suspicion, and there was no privacy in the fort nor any place where we could keep them. ²⁸⁹We carried the box, therefore, into the same hall where we had buried the body, and there, under certain bricks in the best-preserved wall, we made a hollow and put our treasure. ²⁹⁰We made careful note of the place, and next day I drew four plans, one for each of us, and put the sign of the four of us at the bottom, for we had sworn that we should each always act for all, so that none might take advantage. ²⁹¹That is an oath that I can put my hand to my heart and swear that I have never broken.

²⁹²“Well, there's no use my telling you gentlemen what came of the Indian mutiny. ²⁹³After Wilson took Delhi and Sir Colin relieved Lucknow the back of the business was broken. ²⁹⁴Fresh troops came pouring in, and Nana Sahib made himself scarce over the frontier. ²⁹⁵A flying column under Colonel Greathed came round to Agra and cleared the Pandies away from it. ²⁹⁶Peace seemed to be settling upon the country, and we four were beginning to hope that the time was at hand when we might safely go off with our shares of the plunder. ²⁹⁷In a moment, however, our hopes were shattered by our being arrested as the murderers of Achmet.

²⁹⁸“It came about in this way. ²⁹⁹When the rajah put his jewels into the hands of Achmet he did it because he knew that he was a trusty man. ³⁰¹They are suspicious folk in the East, however: so what does this rajah do but take a second even more trusty servant and set him to play the spy upon the first? ³⁰²This second man was ordered never to let Achmet out of his sight, and he followed him like his shadow. ³⁰³He went after him that night and saw him pass through the doorway. ³⁰⁴Of course he thought he had taken refuge in the fort, and applied for admission there himself next day, but could find no trace of Achmet. ³⁰⁵This seemed to him so strange that he spoke about it to a sergeant of guides, who brought it to the ears of the commandant. ³⁰⁶A thorough search was quickly made, and the body was discovered. ³⁰⁷Thus at the very moment that we thought that all was safe we were all four seized and brought to trial on a charge of murder,—three of us because we had held the gate that night, and the fourth because he was known to have been in the company of the murdered man. ³⁰⁸Not a word about the jewels came out at the trial, for the rajah had been deposed and driven out of India: so no one had any particular interest in them. ³⁰⁹The murder, however, was clearly made out, and it was certain that we must all have been concerned in it. ³¹⁰The three Sikhs got penal servitude for life, and I was condemned to death, though my sentence was afterwards commuted into the same as the others.

³¹¹“It was rather a queer position that we found ourselves in then. ³¹²There we were all four tied by the leg and with precious little chance of ever getting out again, while we each held a secret which might have put each of us in a palace if we could only have made use of it. ³¹³It was enough to make a man eat his heart out to have to stand the kick and the cuff of every petty jack-in-office, to have rice to eat and water to drink, when that gorgeous fortune was ready for him outside, just waiting to be picked up. ³¹⁴It might have driven me mad; but I was always a pretty stubborn one, so I just held on and bided my time.

³¹⁵“At last it seemed to me to have come. I was changed from Agra to Madras, and from there to Blair Island in the Andamans. ³¹⁶There are very few white convicts at this settlement, and, as I had behaved well from the first, I soon found myself a sort of privileged person. ³¹⁷I was given a hut in Hope Town, which is a small place on the slopes of Mount Harriet, and I was left pretty much to myself. ³¹⁸It is a dreary, fever-stricken place, and all beyond our little clearings was infested with wild cannibal natives, who were ready enough to blow a poisoned dart at us if they saw a chance. ³¹⁹There was digging, and ditching, and yam-planting, and a dozen other things to be done, so we were busy enough all day; though in the evening we had a little time to ourselves. ³²⁰Among other things, I learned to dispense drugs for

the surgeon, and picked up a smattering of his knowledge. ³²¹All the time I was on the lookout for a chance of escape; but it is hundreds of miles from any other land, and there is little or no wind in those seas: so it was a terribly difficult job to get away.

³²²“The surgeon, Dr. Somerton, was a fast, sporting young chap, and the other young officers would meet in his rooms of an evening and play cards. ³²³The surgery, where I used to make up my drugs, was next to his sitting-room, with a small window between us. ³²⁴Often, if I felt lonesome, I used to turn out the lamp in the surgery, and then, standing there, I could hear their talk and watch their play. ³²⁵I am fond of a hand at cards myself, and it was almost as good as having one to watch the others. ³²⁶There was Major Sholto, Captain Morstan, and Lieutenant Bromley Brown, who were in command of the native troops, and there was the surgeon himself, and two or three prison-officials, crafty old hands who played a nice sly safe game. ³²⁷A very snug little party they used to make.

³²⁸“Well, there was one thing which very soon struck me, and that was that the soldiers used always to lose and the civilians to win. ³²⁹Mind, I don't say that there was anything unfair, but so it was. ³³⁰These prison-chaps had done little else than play cards ever since they had been at the Andamans, and they knew each other's game to a point, while the others just played to pass the time and threw their cards down anyhow. ³³¹Night after night the soldiers got up poorer men, and the poorer they got the more keen they were to play. ³³²Major Sholto was the hardest hit. ³³³He used to pay in notes and gold at first, but soon it came to notes of hand and for big sums. ³³⁴He sometimes would win for a few deals, just to give him heart, and then the luck would set in against him worse than ever. ³³⁵All day he would wander about as black as thunder, and he took to drinking a deal more than was good for him.

³³⁶“One night he lost even more heavily than usual. ³³⁷I was sitting in my hut when he and Captain Morstan came stumbling along on the way to their quarters. ³³⁸They were bosom friends, those two, and never far apart. ³³⁹The major was raving about his losses.

³⁴⁰“‘It's all up, Morstan,’ he was saying, as they passed my hut. ³⁴¹‘I shall have to send in my papers. ³⁴²I am a ruined man.’

³⁴³“‘Nonsense, old chap!’ said the other, slapping him upon the shoulder. ³⁴⁴‘I've had a nasty facer myself, but—’ ³⁴⁵That was all I could hear, but it was enough to set me thinking.

³⁴⁶A couple of days later Major Sholto was strolling on the beach: so I took the chance of speaking to him.

³⁴⁷“‘I wish to have your advice, major,’ said I.

³⁴⁸“‘Well, Small, what is it?’ he asked, taking his cheroot from his lips.

³⁴⁹“‘I wanted to ask you, sir,’ said I, ‘who is the proper person to whom hidden treasure should be handed over. ³⁵⁰I know where half a million worth lies, and, as I cannot use it myself, I thought perhaps the best thing that I could do would be to hand it over to the proper authorities, and then perhaps they would get my sentence shortened for me.’

³⁵¹“‘Half a million, Small?’ he gasped, looking hard at me to see if I was in earnest.

³⁵²“‘Quite that, sir,—in jewels and pearls. ³⁵³It lies there ready for anyone. ³⁵⁴And the queer thing about it is that the real owner is outlawed and cannot hold property, so that it belongs to the first comer.’

³⁵⁵“‘To government, Small,’ he stammered,—‘to government.’ ³⁵⁶But he said it in a halting fashion, and I knew in my heart that I had got him.

³⁵⁷“‘You think, then, sir, that I should give the information to the Governor-General?’ said I, quietly.

³⁵⁸“Well, well, you must not do anything rash, or that you might repent. ³⁵⁹Let me hear all about it, Small. ³⁶⁰Give me the facts.’

³⁶¹“I told him the whole story, with small changes so that he could not identify the places. ³⁶²When I had finished he stood stock still and full of thought. ³⁶³I could see by the twitch of his lip that there was a struggle going on within him.

³⁶⁴“This is a very important matter, Small,’ he said, at last. ³⁶⁵‘You must not say a word to any one about it, and I shall see you again soon.’

³⁶⁶“Two nights later he and his friend Captain Morstan came to my hut in the dead of the night with a lantern.

³⁶⁷“I want you just to let Captain Morstan hear that story from your own lips, Small,’ said he.

³⁶⁸“I repeated it as I had told it before.

³⁶⁹“‘It rings true, eh?’ said he. ³⁷⁰‘It’s good enough to act upon?’

³⁷¹“Captain Morstan nodded.

³⁷²“Look here, Small,’ said the major. ³⁷³‘We have been talking it over, my friend here and I, and we have come to the conclusion that this secret of yours is hardly a government matter, after all, but is a private concern of your own, which of course you have the power of disposing of as you think best. ³⁷³Now, the question is, what price would you ask for it? ³⁷⁴‘We might be inclined to take it up, and at least look into it, if we could agree as to terms.’ ³⁷⁵He tried to speak in a cool, careless way, but his eyes were shining with excitement and greed.

³⁷⁶“‘Why, as to that, gentlemen,’ I answered, trying also to be cool, but feeling as excited as he did, ‘there is only one bargain which a man in my position can make. ³⁷⁷I shall want you to help me to my freedom, and to help my three companions to theirs. ³⁷⁸‘We shall then take you into partnership, and give you a fifth share to divide between you.’

³⁷⁹“‘Hum!’ said he. ³⁸⁰‘A fifth share!’ ³⁸¹‘That is not very tempting.’

³⁸²“‘It would come to fifty thousand apiece,’ said I.

³⁸³“‘But how can we gain your freedom?’ ³⁸⁴‘You know very well that you ask an impossibility.’

³⁸⁵“‘Nothing of the sort,’ I answered. ³⁸⁶‘I have thought it all out to the last detail. ³⁸⁷‘The only bar to our escape is that we can get no boat fit for the voyage, and no provisions to last us for so long a time. ³⁸⁸‘There are plenty of little yachts and yawls at Calcutta or Madras which would serve our turn well. ³⁸⁹‘Do you bring one over. ³⁹⁰‘We shall engage to get aboard her by night, and if you will drop us on any part of the Indian coast you will have done your part of the bargain.’

³⁹¹“‘If there were only one,’ he said.

³⁹²“‘None or all,’ I answered. ³⁹³‘We have sworn it. ³⁹⁴‘The four of us must always act together.’

³⁹⁵“‘You see, Morstan,’ said he, ‘Small is a man of his word. ³⁹⁶‘He does not flinch from his friend. ³⁹⁷‘I think we may very well trust him.’

³⁹⁸“‘It’s a dirty business,’ the other answered. ³⁹⁹‘Yet, as you say, the money would save our commissions handsomely.’

⁴⁰⁰“‘Well, Small,’ said the major, ‘we must, I suppose, try and meet you. ⁴⁰¹‘We must first, of course, test the truth of your story. ⁴⁰²‘Tell me where the box is hid, and I shall get leave of absence and go back to India in the monthly relief-boat to inquire into the affair.’

⁴⁰³“Not so fast,’ said I, growing colder as he got hot. ⁴⁰⁴‘I must have the consent of my three comrades. ⁴⁰⁵I tell you that it is four or none with us.’

⁴⁰⁶“Nonsense!’ he broke in. ⁴⁰⁷‘What have three black fellows to do with our agreement?’

⁴⁰⁸“Black or blue,’ said I, ‘they are in with me, and we all go together.’

⁴⁰⁹“Well, the matter ended by a second meeting, at which Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar were all present. ⁴¹⁰We talked the matter over again, and at last we came to an arrangement. ⁴¹¹We were to provide both the officers with charts of the part of the Agra fort and mark the place in the wall where the treasure was hid. ⁴¹²Major Sholto was to go to India to test our story. ⁴¹³If he found the box he was to leave it there, to send out a small yacht provisioned for a voyage, which was to lie off Rutland Island, and to which we were to make our way, and finally to return to his duties. ⁴¹⁴Captain Morstan was then to apply for leave of absence, to meet us at Agra, and there we were to have a final division of the treasure, he taking the major's share as well as his own. ⁴¹⁵All this we sealed by the most solemn oaths that the mind could think or the lips utter. ⁴¹⁶I sat up all night with paper and ink, and by the morning I had the two charts all ready, signed with the sign of four,—that is, of Abdullah, Akbar, Mahomet, and myself.

⁴¹⁷“Well, gentlemen, I weary you with my long story, and I know that my friend Mr. Jones is impatient to get me safely stowed in chokey. ⁴¹⁸I'll make it as short as I can. ⁴¹⁹The villain Sholto went off to India, but he never came back again. ⁴²⁰Captain Morstan showed me his name among a list of passengers in one of the mail-boats very shortly afterwards. ⁴²¹His uncle had died, leaving him a fortune, and he had left the army, yet he could stoop to treat five men as he had treated us. ⁴²²Morstan went over to Agra shortly afterwards, and found, as we expected, that the treasure was indeed gone. ⁴²³The scoundrel had stolen it all, without carrying out one of the conditions on which we had sold him the secret. ⁴²⁴From that day I lived only for vengeance. ⁴²⁵I thought of it by day and I nursed it by night. ⁴²⁶It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with me. ⁴²⁷I cared nothing for the law,—nothing for the gallows. ⁴²⁸To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat,—that was my one thought. ⁴²⁹Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto.

⁴³⁰“Well, I have set my mind on many things in this life, and never one which I did not carry out. ⁴³¹But it was weary years before my time came. ⁴³²I have told you that I had picked up something of medicine. ⁴³³One day when Dr. Somerton was down with a fever a little Andaman Islander was picked up by a convict-gang in the woods. ⁴³⁴He was sick to death, and had gone to a lonely place to die. ⁴³⁵I took him in hand, though he was as venomous as a young snake, and after a couple of months I got him all right and able to walk. ⁴³⁶He took a kind of fancy to me then, and would hardly go back to his woods, but was always hanging about my hut. ⁴³⁷I learned a little of his lingo from him, and this made him all the fonder of me.

⁴³⁸“Tonga—for that was his name—was a fine boatman, and owned a big, roomy canoe of his own. ⁴³⁹When I found that he was devoted to me and would do anything to serve me, I saw my chance of escape. ⁴⁴⁰I talked it over with him. ⁴⁴¹He was to bring his boat round on a certain night to an old wharf which was never guarded, and there he was to pick me up. ⁴⁴²I gave him directions to have several gourds of water and a lot of yams, cocoa-nuts, and sweet potatoes.

⁴⁴³“He was stanch and true, was little Tonga. ⁴⁴⁴No man ever had a more faithful mate. ⁴⁴⁵At the night named he had his boat at the wharf. ⁴⁴⁶As it chanced, however, there was one of the convict-guard down there,—a vile Pathan who had never missed a chance of insulting and injuring me. ⁴⁴⁷I had always vowed vengeance, and now I had my chance. ⁴⁴⁸It was as if fate had placed him in my way that I might pay my debt before I left the island. ⁴⁴⁹He stood on the bank with his back to me, and his carbine on his shoulder. ⁴⁵⁰I looked about for a stone to beat out his brains with, but none could I see.

⁴⁵¹“Then a queer thought came into my head and showed me where I could lay my hand on a weapon. ⁴⁵²I sat down in the darkness and unstrapped my wooden leg. ⁴⁵³With three long hops I was on him. ⁴⁵⁴He put his carbine to his shoulder, but I struck him full, and knocked the whole front of his skull in. ⁴⁵³You can see the split in the wood now where I hit him. ⁴⁵⁴We both went down together, for I could not keep my balance, but when I got up I found him still lying quiet enough. ⁴⁵⁵I made for the boat, and in an hour we were well out at sea. ⁴⁵⁶Tonga had brought all his earthly possessions with him, his arms and his gods. ⁴⁵⁷Among other things, he had a long bamboo spear, and some Andaman cocoa-nut matting, with which I made a sort of sail. ⁴⁵⁸For ten days we were beating about, trusting to luck, and on the eleventh we were picked up by a trader which was going from Singapore to Jiddah with a cargo of Malay pilgrims. ⁴⁵⁹They were a rum crowd, and Tonga and I soon managed to settle down among them. ⁴⁶⁰They had one very good quality: they let you alone and asked no questions.

⁴⁶¹“Well, if I were to tell you all the adventures that my little chum and I went through, you would not thank me, for I would have you here until the sun was shining. ⁴⁶²Here and there we drifted about the world, something always turning up to keep us from London. ⁴⁶³All the time, however, I never lost sight of my purpose. ⁴⁶⁴I would dream of Sholto at night. ⁴⁶⁵A hundred times I have killed him in my sleep. ⁴⁶⁶At last, however, some three or four years ago, we found ourselves in England. ⁴⁶⁷I had no great difficulty in finding where Sholto lived, and I set to work to discover whether he had realized the treasure, or if he still had it. ⁴⁶⁸I made friends with someone who could help me,—I name no names, for I don't want to get any one else in a hole,—and I soon found that he still had the jewels. ⁴⁶⁹Then I tried to get at him in many ways; but he was pretty sly, and had always two prize-fighters, besides his sons and his khitmutgar, on guard over him.

⁴⁷⁰“One day, however, I got word that he was dying. ⁴⁷¹I hurried at once to the garden, mad that he should slip out of my clutches like that, and, looking through the window, I saw him lying in his bed, with his sons on each side of him. ⁴⁷²I'd have come through and taken my chance with the three of them, only even as I looked at him his jaw dropped, and I knew that he was gone. ⁴⁷³I got into his room that same night, though, and I searched his papers to see if there was any record of where he had hidden our jewels. ⁴⁷⁴There was not a line, however: so I came away, bitter and savage as a man could be. ⁴⁷⁵Before I left I bethought me that if I ever met my Sikh friends again it would be a satisfaction to know that I had left some mark of our hatred: so I scrawled down the sign of the four of us, as it had been on the chart, and I pinned it on his bosom. ⁴⁷⁶It was too much that he should be taken to the grave without some token from the men whom he had robbed and befooled.

⁴⁷⁷“We earned a living at this time by my exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal. ⁴⁷⁸He would eat raw meat and dance his war-dance: so we always had a hatful of pennies after a day's work. ⁴⁷⁹I still heard all the news from Pondicherry Lodge, and for some years there was no news to hear, except that they were hunting for the treasure. ⁴⁸⁰At last, however, came what we had waited for so long. ⁴⁸¹The treasure had been found. ⁴⁸²It was up at the top of the house, in Mr. Bartholomew Sholto's chemical laboratory. ⁴⁸³I came at once and had a look at the place, but I could not see how with my wooden leg I was to make my way up to it. ⁴⁸⁴I learned, however, about a trap-door in the roof, and also about Mr. Sholto's supper-hour. ⁴⁸⁵It seemed to me that I could manage the thing easily through Tonga. ⁴⁸⁶I brought him out with me with a long rope wound round his waist. ⁴⁸⁷He could climb like a cat, and he soon made his way through the roof, but, as ill luck would have it, Bartholomew Sholto was still in the room, to his cost. ⁴⁸⁸Tonga thought he had done something very clever in killing him, for when I came up by the rope I found him strutting about as proud as a peacock. ⁴⁸⁹Very much surprised was he when I made at him with the rope's end and cursed him for a little blood-thirsty imp. ⁴⁹⁰I took the treasure-box and let it down, and then slid down myself, having first left the sign of the four upon the table, to show that the jewels had come back at last to those who had most right to them. ⁴⁹¹Tonga then pulled up the rope, closed the window, and made off the way that he had come.

⁴⁹²“I don't know that I have anything else to tell you. ⁴⁹³I had heard a waterman speak of the speed of Smith's launch, the Aurora, so I thought she would be a handy craft for our escape. ⁴⁹⁴I engaged with old Smith, and was to give him a big sum if he got us safe to our ship. ⁴⁹⁵He knew, no doubt, that there was some screw loose, but he was not in our secrets. ⁴⁹⁶All this is the truth, and if I tell it to you, gentlemen, it is not to amuse you,—for you have not done me a very good turn,—but it is because I believe the best defence I can make is just to hold back nothing, but let all the world know how badly I have myself been served by Major Sholto, and how innocent I am of the death of his son.”

⁴⁹⁷“A very remarkable account,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁴⁹⁸“A fitting wind-up to an extremely interesting case. ⁴⁹⁹There is nothing at all new to me in the latter part of your narrative, except that you brought your own rope. ⁵⁰⁰That I did not know. ⁵⁰¹By the way, I had hoped that Tonga had lost all his darts; yet he managed to shoot one at us in the boat.”

⁵⁰²“He had lost them all, sir, except the one which was in his blow-pipe at the time.”

⁵⁰³“Ah, of course,” said Holmes. ⁵⁰⁴“I had not thought of that.”

⁵⁰⁵“Is there any other point which you would like to ask about?” asked the convict, affably.

⁵⁰⁶“I think not, thank you,” my companion answered.

⁵⁰⁷“Well, Holmes,” said Athelney Jones, “You are a man to be humored, and we all know that you are a connoisseur of crime, but duty is duty, and I have gone rather far in doing what you and your friend asked me. ⁵⁰⁸I shall feel more at ease when we have our story-teller here safe under lock and key. ⁵⁰⁹The cab still waits, and there are two inspectors down-stairs. ⁵¹⁰I am much obliged to you both for your assistance. ⁵¹¹Of course you will be wanted at the trial. ⁵¹²Good-night to you.”

⁵¹³“Good-night, gentlemen both,” said Jonathan Small.

⁵¹⁴“You first, Small,” remarked the wary Jones as they left the room. ⁵¹⁵“I'll take particular care that you don't club me with your wooden leg, whatever you may have done to the gentleman at the Andaman Isles.”

⁵¹⁶“Well, and there is the end of our little drama,” I remarked, after we had set some time smoking in silence. ⁵¹⁷“I fear that it may be the last investigation in which I shall have the chance of studying your methods. ⁵¹⁸Miss Morstan has done me the honor to accept me as a husband in prospective.”

⁵¹⁹He gave a most dismal groan. ⁵²⁰“I feared as much,” said he. ⁵²¹“I really cannot congratulate you.”

⁵²²I was a little hurt. ⁵²³“Have you any reason to be dissatisfied with my choice?” I asked.

⁵²⁴“Not at all. ⁵²⁵I think she is one of the most charming young ladies I ever met, and might have been most useful in such work as we have been doing. ⁵²⁶She had a decided genius that way: witness the way in which she preserved that Agra plan from all the other papers of her father. ⁵²⁷But love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things. ⁵²⁸I should never marry myself, lest I bias my judgment.”

⁵²⁹“I trust,” said I, laughing, “that my judgment may survive the ordeal. ⁵³⁰But you look weary.”

⁵³¹“Yes, the reaction is already upon me. ⁵³²I shall be as limp as a rag for a week.”

⁵³³“Strange,” said I, “how terms of what in another man I should call laziness alternate with your fits of splendid energy and vigor.”

⁵³⁴“Yes,” he answered, “there are in me the makings of a very fine loafer and also of a pretty spry sort of fellow. ⁵³⁵I often think of those lines of old Goethe,—

⁵³⁶Schade, daß die Natur nur Mensch aus Dir schuf,

⁵³⁷Denn zum würdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff.

⁵³⁸“By the way, a propos of this Norwood business, you see that they had, as I surmised, a confederate in the house, who could be none other than Lal Rao, the butler: so Jones actually has the undivided honor of having caught one fish in his great haul.”

⁵³⁹“The division seems rather unfair,” I remarked. ⁵⁴⁰“You have done all the work in this business. ⁵⁴¹I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?”

⁵⁴²“For me,” said Sherlock Holmes, “there still remains the cocaine-bottle.” ⁵⁴³And he stretched his long white hand up for it.

The Hound of the Baskervilles

Chapter I.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

¹Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who was usually very late in the mornings, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated at the breakfast table. ²I stood upon the hearth-rug and picked up the stick which our visitor had left behind him the night before. ³It was a fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as a “Penang lawyer.” ⁴Just under the head was a broad silver band nearly an inch across. ⁵“To James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., from his friends of the C.C.H.,” was engraved upon it, with the date “1884.” ⁶It was just such a stick as the old-fashioned family practitioner used to carry—dignified, solid, and reassuring.

⁷“Well, Watson, what do you make of it?”

⁸Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of my occupation.

⁹“How did you know what I was doing? ¹⁰I believe you have eyes in the back of your head.”

¹¹“I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated coffee-pot in front of me,” said he. ¹²“But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor's stick? ¹³Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance. ¹⁴Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it.”

¹⁵“I think,” said I, following as far as I could the methods of my companion, “that Dr. Mortimer is a successful, elderly medical man, well-esteemed since those who know him give him this mark of their appreciation.”

¹⁶“Good!” said Holmes. ¹⁷“Excellent!”

¹⁸“I think also that the probability is in favour of his being a country practitioner who does a great deal of his visiting on foot.”

¹⁹“Why so?”

²⁰“Because this stick, though originally a very handsome one has been so knocked about that I can hardly imagine a town practitioner carrying it. ²¹The thick-iron ferrule is worn down, so it is evident that he has done a great amount of walking with it.”

²²“Perfectly sound!” said Holmes.

²³“And then again, there is the ‘friends of the C.C.H.’ ²⁴I should guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has possibly given some surgical assistance, and which has made him a small presentation in return.”

²⁵“Really, Watson, you excel yourself,” said Holmes, pushing back his chair and lighting a cigarette.

²⁶“I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. ²⁷It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. ²⁸Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. ²⁹I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt.”

³⁰He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. ³¹I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. ³²He now took the stick from my hands and examined it for a few

minutes with his naked eyes. ³³Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette, and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a convex lens.

³⁴“Interesting, though elementary,” said he as he returned to his favourite corner of the settee. ³⁵“There are certainly one or two indications upon the stick. ³⁶It gives us the basis for several deductions.”

³⁷“Has anything escaped me?” I asked with some self-importance. ³⁸“I trust that there is nothing of consequence which I have overlooked?”

³⁹“I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were erroneous. ⁴⁰When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. ⁴¹Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. ⁴²The man is certainly a country practitioner. ⁴³And he walks a good deal.”

⁴⁴“Then I was right.”

⁴⁵“To that extent.”

⁴⁶“But that was all.”

⁴⁷“No, no, my dear Watson, not all—by no means all. ⁴⁸I would suggest, for example, that a presentation to a doctor is more likely to come from a hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials ‘C.C.’ are placed before that hospital the words ‘Charing Cross’ very naturally suggest themselves.”

⁴⁹“You may be right.”

⁵⁰“The probability lies in that direction. ⁵¹And if we take this as a working hypothesis we have a fresh basis from which to start our construction of this unknown visitor.”

⁵²“Well, then, supposing that ‘C.C.H.’ does stand for ‘Charing Cross Hospital,’ what further inferences may we draw?”

⁵³“Do none suggest themselves? ⁵⁴You know my methods. ⁵⁵Apply them!”

⁵⁶“I can only think of the obvious conclusion that the man has practised in town before going to the country.”

⁵⁷“I think that we might venture a little farther than this. ⁵⁸Look at it in this light. ⁵⁹On what occasion would it be most probable that such a presentation would be made? ⁶⁰When would his friends unite to give him a pledge of their good will? ⁶¹Obviously at the moment when Dr. Mortimer withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start in practice for himself. ⁶²We know there has been a presentation. ⁶³We believe there has been a change from a town hospital to a country practice. ⁶⁴Is it, then, stretching our inference too far to say that the presentation was on the occasion of the change?”

⁶⁵“It certainly seems probable.”

⁶⁶“Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the staff of the hospital, since only a man well-established in a London practice could hold such a position, and such a one would not drift into the country. ⁶⁷What was he, then? ⁶⁸If he was in the hospital and yet not on the staff he could only have been a house-surgeon or a house-physician—little more than a senior student. ⁶⁹And he left five years ago—the date is on the stick. ⁷⁰So your grave, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff.”

⁷¹I laughed incredulously as Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his settee and blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

⁷²“As to the latter part, I have no means of checking you,” said I, “but at least it is not difficult to find out a few particulars about the man's age and professional career.” ⁷³From my small medical shelf I took down the Medical Directory and turned up the name. ⁷⁴There were several Mortimers, but only one who could be our visitor. ⁷⁵I read his record aloud.

⁷⁶“Mortimer, James, M.R.C.S., 1882, Grimpen, Dartmoor, Devon. ⁷⁷House-surgeon, from 1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital. ⁷⁸Winner of the Jackson prize for Comparative Pathology, with essay entitled ‘Is Disease a Reversion?’ ⁷⁹Corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society. ⁸⁰Author of ‘Some Freaks of Atavism’ (Lancet 1882). ⁸¹‘Do We Progress?’ (Journal of Psychology, March, 1883). ⁸²Medical Officer for the parishes of Grimpen, Thorsley, and High Barrow.”

⁸³“No mention of that local hunt, Watson,” said Holmes with a mischievous smile, “but a country doctor, as you very astutely observed. ⁸⁴I think that I am fairly justified in my inferences. ⁸⁵As to the adjectives, I said, if I remember right, amiable, unambitious, and absent-minded. ⁸⁶It is my experience that it is only an amiable man in this world who receives testimonials, only an unambitious one who abandons a London career for the country, and only an absent-minded one who leaves his stick and not his visiting-card after waiting an hour in your room.”

⁸⁷“And the dog?”

⁸⁸“Has been in the habit of carrying this stick behind his master. ⁸⁹Being a heavy stick the dog has held it tightly by the middle, and the marks of his teeth are very plainly visible. ⁹⁰The dog's jaw, as shown in the space between these marks, is too broad in my opinion for a terrier and not broad enough for a mastiff. ⁹¹It may have been—yes, by Jove, it is a curly-haired spaniel.”

⁹²He had risen and paced the room as he spoke. ⁹³Now he halted in the recess of the window. ⁹⁴There was such a ring of conviction in his voice that I glanced up in surprise.

⁹⁵“My dear fellow, how can you possibly be so sure of that?”

⁹⁶“For the very simple reason that I see the dog himself on our very door-step, and there is the ring of its owner. ⁹⁷Don't move, I beg you, Watson. ⁹⁸He is a professional brother of yours, and your presence may be of assistance to me. ⁹⁹Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill. ¹⁰⁰What does Dr. James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime? ¹⁰¹Come in!”

¹⁰²The appearance of our visitor was a surprise to me, since I had expected a typical country practitioner. ¹⁰³He was a very tall, thin man, with a long nose like a beak, which jutted out between two keen, gray eyes, set closely together and sparkling brightly from behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. ¹⁰⁴He was clad in a professional but rather slovenly fashion, for his frock-coat was dingy and his trousers frayed. ¹⁰⁵Though young, his long back was already bowed, and he walked with a forward thrust of his head and a general air of peering benevolence. ¹⁰⁶As he entered his eyes fell upon the stick in Holmes's hand, and he ran towards it with an exclamation of joy. ¹⁰⁷“I am so very glad,” said he. ¹⁰⁸“I was not sure whether I had left it here or in the Shipping Office. ¹⁰⁹I would not lose that stick for the world.”

¹¹⁰“A presentation, I see,” said Holmes.

¹¹¹“Yes, sir.”

¹¹²“From Charing Cross Hospital?”

¹¹³“From one or two friends there on the occasion of my marriage.”

¹¹⁴“Dear, dear, that's bad!” said Holmes, shaking his head.

¹¹⁵Dr. Mortimer blinked through his glasses in mild astonishment.

¹¹⁶“Why was it bad?”

¹¹⁷“Only that you have disarranged our little deductions. ¹¹⁸Your marriage, you say?”

¹¹⁹“Yes, sir. ¹²⁰I married, and so left the hospital, and with it all hopes of a consulting practice. ¹²¹It was necessary to make a home of my own.”

¹²²“Come, come, we are not so far wrong, after all,” said Holmes. ¹²³“And now, Dr. James Mortimer—”

¹²⁴“Mister, sir, Mister—a humble M.R.C.S.”

¹²⁵“And a man of precise mind, evidently.”

¹²⁶“A dabbler in science, Mr. Holmes, a picker up of shells on the shores of the great unknown ocean.

¹²⁷I presume that it is Mr. Sherlock Holmes whom I am addressing and not—”

¹²⁸“No, this is my friend Dr. Watson.”

¹²⁹“Glad to meet you, sir. ¹³⁰I have heard your name mentioned in connection with that of your friend.

¹³¹You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. ¹³²I had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked supra-orbital development. ¹³³Would you have any objection to my running my finger along your parietal fissure? ¹³⁴A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. ¹³⁵It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull.”

¹³⁶Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. ¹³⁷“You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in mine,” said he. ¹³⁸“I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. ¹³⁹Have no hesitation in lighting one.”

¹⁴⁰The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity.

¹⁴¹He had long, quivering fingers as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

¹⁴²Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in our curious companion.

¹⁴³“I presume, sir,” said he at last, “that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that you have done me the honour to call here last night and again to-day?”

¹⁴⁴“No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing that as well. ¹⁴⁵I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognized that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem. ¹⁴⁶Recognizing, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe—”

¹⁴⁷“Indeed, sir! ¹⁴⁸May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?” asked Holmes with some asperity.

¹⁴⁹“To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly.”

¹⁵⁰“Then had you not better consult him?”

¹⁵¹“I said, sir, to the precisely scientific mind. ¹⁵²But as a practical man of affairs it is acknowledged that you stand alone. ¹⁵³I trust, sir, that I have not inadvertently—”

¹⁵⁴“Just a little,” said Holmes. ¹⁵⁵“I think, Dr. Mortimer, you would do wisely if without more ado you would kindly tell me plainly what the exact nature of the problem is in which you demand my assistance.”

Chapter II.

The Curse of the Baskervilles

¹“I have in my pocket a manuscript,” said Dr. James Mortimer.

²“I observed it as you entered the room,” said Holmes.

³“It is an old manuscript.”

⁴“Early eighteenth century, unless it is a forgery.”

⁵“How can you say that, sir?”

⁶“You have presented an inch or two of it to my examination all the time that you have been talking. ⁷It would be a poor expert who could not give the date of a document within a decade or so. ⁸You may possibly have read my little monograph upon the subject. ⁹I put that at 1730.”

¹⁰“The exact date is 1742.” ¹¹Dr. Mortimer drew it from his breast-pocket. ¹²“This family paper was committed to my care by Sir Charles Baskerville, whose sudden and tragic death some three months ago created so much excitement in Devonshire. ¹³I may say that I was his personal friend as well as his medical attendant. ¹⁴He was a strong-minded man, sir, shrewd, practical, and as unimaginative as I am myself. ¹⁵Yet he took this document very seriously, and his mind was prepared for just such an end as did eventually overtake him.”

¹⁶Holmes stretched out his hand for the manuscript and flattened it upon his knee.

¹⁷“You will observe, Watson, the alternative use of the long s and the short. ¹⁸It is one of several indications which enabled me to fix the date.”

¹⁹I looked over his shoulder at the yellow paper and the faded script. ²⁰At the head was written: “Baskerville Hall,” and below in large, scrawling figures: “1742.”

²¹“It appears to be a statement of some sort.”

²²“Yes, it is a statement of a certain legend which runs in the Baskerville family.”

²³“But I understand that it is something more modern and practical upon which you wish to consult me?”

²⁴“Most modern. ²⁵A most practical, pressing matter, which must be decided within twenty-four hours.

²⁶But the manuscript is short and is intimately connected with the affair. ²⁷With your permission I will read it to you.”

²⁸Holmes leaned back in his chair, placed his finger-tips together, and closed his eyes, with an air of resignation. ²⁹Dr. Mortimer turned the manuscript to the light and read in a high, cracking voice the following curious, old-world narrative:—

³⁰“Of the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles there have been many statements, yet as I come in a direct line from Hugo Baskerville, and as I had the story from my father, who also had it from his, I have set it down with all belief that it occurred even as is here set forth. ³¹And I would have you believe, my sons, that the same Justice which punishes sin may also most graciously forgive it, and that no ban is so heavy but that by prayer and repentance it may be removed. ³²Learn then from this story not to fear the fruits of the past, but rather to be circumspect in the future, that those foul passions whereby our family has suffered so grievously may not again be loosed to our undoing.

³³“Know then that in the time of the Great Rebellion (the history of which by the learned Lord Clarendon I most earnestly commend to your attention) this Manor of Baskerville was held by Hugo of that name, nor can it be gainsaid that he was a most wild, profane, and godless man. ³⁴This, in truth, his neighbours might have pardoned, seeing that saints have never flourished in those parts, but there was in him a certain wanton and cruel humour which made his name a byword through the West. ³⁵It chanced that this Hugo came to love (if, indeed, so dark a passion may be known under so bright a name) the daughter of a yeoman who held lands near the Baskerville estate. ³⁶But the young maiden, being discreet and of good repute, would ever avoid him, for she feared his evil name. ³⁷So it came to pass that one Michaelmas this Hugo, with five or six of his idle and wicked companions, stole down upon the farm and carried off the maiden, her father and brothers being from home, as he well knew. ³⁸When they had brought her to the Hall the maiden was placed in an upper chamber, while Hugo and his friends sat down to a long carouse, as was their nightly custom. ³⁹Now, the poor lass upstairs was like to have her wits turned at the singing and shouting and terrible oaths which came up to her from below, for they say that the words used by Hugo Baskerville, when he was in wine, were such as might blast the man who said them. ⁴⁰At last in the stress of her fear she did that which might have daunted the bravest or most active man, for by the aid of the growth of ivy which covered (and still covers) the south wall she came down from under the eaves, and so homeward across the moor, there being three leagues betwixt the Hall and her father's farm.

⁴¹“It chanced that some little time later Hugo left his guests to carry food and drink—with other worse things, perchance—to his captive, and so found the cage empty and the bird escaped. ⁴²Then, as it would seem, he became as one that hath a devil, for, rushing down the stairs into the dining-hall, he sprang upon the great table, flagons and trenchers flying before him, and he cried aloud before all the company that he would that very night render his body and soul to the Powers of Evil if he might but overtake the wench. ⁴³And while the revellers stood aghast at the fury of the man, one more wicked or, it may be, more drunken than the rest, cried out that they should put the hounds upon her. ⁴⁴Whereat Hugo ran from the house, crying to his grooms that they should saddle his mare and unkennel the pack, and giving the hounds a kerchief of the maid's, he swung them to the line, and so off full cry in the moonlight over the moor.

⁴⁵“Now, for some space the revellers stood agape, unable to understand all that had been done in such haste. ⁴⁶But anon their bemused wits awoke to the nature of the deed which was like to be done upon the moorlands. ⁴⁷Everything was now in an uproar, some calling for their pistols, some for their horses, and some for another flask of wine. ⁴⁸But at length some sense came back to their crazed minds, and the whole of them, thirteen in number, took horse and started in pursuit. ⁴⁹The moon shone clear above them, and they rode swiftly abreast, taking that course which the maid must needs have taken if she were to reach her own home.

⁵⁰“They had gone a mile or two when they passed one of the night shepherds upon the moorlands, and they cried to him to know if he had seen the hunt. ⁵¹And the man, as the story goes, was so crazed with fear that he could scarce speak, but at last he said that he had indeed seen the unhappy maiden, with the hounds upon her track. ⁵²‘But I have seen more than that,’ said he, ‘for Hugo Baskerville passed me upon his black mare, and there ran mute behind him such a hound of hell as God forbid should ever be at my heels.’ ⁵³So the drunken squires cursed the shepherd and rode onward. ⁵⁴But soon their skins turned cold, for there came a galloping across the moor, and the black mare, dabbled with white froth, went past with trailing bridle and empty saddle. ⁵⁵Then the revellers rode close together, for a great fear was on them, but they still followed over the moor, though each, had he been alone, would have been right glad to have turned his horse's head. ⁵⁶Riding slowly in this fashion they came at last upon the hounds. ⁵⁷These, though known for their valour and their breed, were whimpering in a cluster at the head of a deep dip or goyal, as we call it, upon the moor, some slinking away and some, with starting hackles and staring eyes, gazing down the narrow valley before them.

⁵⁸“The company had come to a halt, more sober men, as you may guess, than when they started. ⁵⁹The most of them would by no means advance, but three of them, the boldest, or it may be the most drunken, rode forward down the goyal. ⁶⁰Now, it opened into a broad space in which stood two of those great stones, still to be seen there, which were set by certain forgotten peoples in the days of old. ⁶¹The moon was shining bright upon the clearing, and there in the centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen, dead of fear and of fatigue. ⁶²But it was not the sight of her body, nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo Baskerville lying near her, which raised the hair upon the heads of these three daredevil roysterers, but it was that, standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat, there stood a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon. ⁶³And even as they looked the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville, on which, as it turned its blazing eyes and dripping jaws upon them, the three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still screaming, across the moor. ⁶⁴One, it is said, died that very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were but broken men for the rest of their days.

⁶⁵“Such is the tale, my sons, of the coming of the hound which is said to have plagued the family so sorely ever since. ⁶⁶If I have set it down it is because that which is clearly known hath less terror than that which is but hinted at and guessed. ⁶⁷Nor can it be denied that many of the family have been unhappy in their deaths, which have been sudden, bloody, and mysterious. ⁶⁸Yet may we shelter ourselves in the infinite goodness of Providence, which would not forever punish the innocent beyond that third or fourth generation which is threatened in Holy Writ. ⁶⁹To that Providence, my sons, I hereby commend you, and I counsel you by way of caution to forbear from crossing the moor in those dark hours when the powers of evil are exalted.

⁷⁰“[This from Hugo Baskerville to his sons Rodger and John, with instructions that they say nothing thereof to their sister Elizabeth.]“

⁷¹When Dr. Mortimer had finished reading this singular narrative he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and stared across at Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ⁷²The latter yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire.

⁷³“Well?” said he.

⁷⁴“Do you not find it interesting?”

⁷⁵“To a collector of fairy tales.”

⁷⁶Dr. Mortimer drew a folded newspaper out of his pocket.

⁷⁷“Now, Mr. Holmes, we will give you something a little more recent. ⁷⁸This is the Devon County Chronicle of May 14th of this year. ⁷⁹It is a short account of the facts elicited at the death of Sir Charles Baskerville which occurred a few days before that date.”

⁸⁰My friend leaned a little forward and his expression became intent. ⁸¹Our visitor readjusted his glasses and began:—

⁸²“The recent sudden death of Sir Charles Baskerville, whose name has been mentioned as the probable Liberal candidate for Mid-Devon at the next election, has cast a gloom over the county. ⁸³Though Sir Charles had resided at Baskerville Hall for a comparatively short period his amiability of character and extreme generosity had won the affection and respect of all who had been brought into contact with him. ⁸⁴In these days of nouveaux riches it is refreshing to find a case where the scion of an old county family which has fallen upon evil days is able to make his own fortune and to bring it back with him to restore the fallen grandeur of his line. ⁸⁵Sir Charles, as is well known, made large sums of money in South African speculation. ⁸⁶More wise than those who go on until the wheel turns against them, he realized his gains and returned to England with them. ⁸⁷It is only two years since he took up his residence at Baskerville Hall, and it is common talk how large were those schemes of reconstruction and

improvement which have been interrupted by his death. ⁸⁸Being himself childless, it was his openly expressed desire that the whole country-side should, within his own lifetime, profit by his good fortune, and many will have personal reasons for bewailing his untimely end. ⁸⁹His generous donations to local and county charities have been frequently chronicled in these columns.

⁹⁰“The circumstances connected with the death of Sir Charles cannot be said to have been entirely cleared up by the inquest, but at least enough has been done to dispose of those rumours to which local superstition has given rise. ⁹¹There is no reason whatever to suspect foul play, or to imagine that death could be from any but natural causes. ⁹²Sir Charles was a widower, and a man who may be said to have been in some ways of an eccentric habit of mind. ⁹³In spite of his considerable wealth he was simple in his personal tastes, and his indoor servants at Baskerville Hall consisted of a married couple named Barrymore, the husband acting as butler and the wife as housekeeper. ⁹⁴Their evidence, corroborated by that of several friends, tends to show that Sir Charles's health has for some time been impaired, and points especially to some affection of the heart, manifesting itself in changes of colour, breathlessness, and acute attacks of nervous depression. ⁹⁵Dr. James Mortimer, the friend and medical attendant of the deceased, has given evidence to the same effect.

⁹⁶“The facts of the case are simple. ⁹⁷Sir Charles Baskerville was in the habit every night before going to bed of walking down the famous Yew Alley of Baskerville Hall. ⁹⁸The evidence of the Barrymores shows that this had been his custom. ⁹⁹On the 4th of May Sir Charles had declared his intention of starting next day for London, and had ordered Barrymore to prepare his luggage. ¹⁰⁰That night he went out as usual for his nocturnal walk, in the course of which he was in the habit of smoking a cigar. ¹⁰¹He never returned. ¹⁰²At twelve o'clock Barrymore, finding the hall door still open, became alarmed, and, lighting a lantern, went in search of his master. ¹⁰³The day had been wet, and Sir Charles's footmarks were easily traced down the Alley. ¹⁰⁴Half-way down this walk there is a gate which leads out on to the moor. ¹⁰⁵There were indications that Sir Charles had stood for some little time here. ¹⁰⁶He then proceeded down the Alley, and it was at the far end of it that his body was discovered. ¹⁰⁷One fact which has not been explained is the statement of Barrymore that his master's footprints altered their character from the time that he passed the moor-gate, and that he appeared from thence onward to have been walking upon his toes. ¹⁰⁸One Murphy, a gipsy horse-dealer, was on the moor at no great distance at the time, but he appears by his own confession to have been the worse for drink. ¹⁰⁹He declares that he heard cries, but is unable to state from what direction they came. ¹¹⁰No signs of violence were to be discovered upon Sir Charles's person, and though the doctor's evidence pointed to an almost incredible facial distortion—so great that Dr. Mortimer refused at first to believe that it was indeed his friend and patient who lay before him—it was explained that that is a symptom which is not unusual in cases of dyspnoea and death from cardiac exhaustion. ¹¹¹This explanation was borne out by the post-mortem examination, which showed long-standing organic disease, and the coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. ¹¹²It is well that this is so, for it is obviously of the utmost importance that Sir Charles's heir should settle at the Hall and continue the good work which has been so sadly interrupted. ¹¹³Had the prosaic finding of the coroner not finally put an end to the romantic stories which have been whispered in connection with the affair, it might have been difficult to find a tenant for Baskerville Hall. ¹¹⁴It is understood that the next of kin is Mr. Henry Baskerville, if he be still alive, the son of Sir Charles Baskerville's younger brother. ¹¹⁵The young man when last heard of was in America, and inquiries are being instituted with a view to informing him of his good fortune.”

¹¹⁶Dr. Mortimer refolded his paper and replaced it in his pocket.

¹¹⁷“Those are the public facts, Mr. Holmes, in connection with the death of Sir Charles Baskerville.”

¹¹⁸“I must thank you,” said Sherlock Holmes, “for calling my attention to a case which certainly presents some features of interest. ¹¹⁹I had observed some newspaper comment at the time, but I was exceedingly preoccupied by that little affair of the Vatican cameos, and in my anxiety to oblige the Pope I lost touch with several interesting English cases. ¹²⁰This article, you say, contains all the public facts?”

¹²¹“It does.”

¹²²“Then let me have the private ones.” ¹²³He leaned back, put his finger-tips together, and assumed his most impassive and judicial expression.

¹²⁴“In doing so,” said Dr. Mortimer, who had begun to show signs of some strong emotion, “I am telling that which I have not confided to anyone. ¹²⁵My motive for withholding it from the coroner's inquiry is that a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to indorse a popular superstition. ¹²⁶I had the further motive that Baskerville Hall, as the paper says, would certainly remain untenanted if anything were done to increase its already rather grim reputation. ¹²⁷For both these reasons I thought that I was justified in telling rather less than I knew, since no practical good could result from it, but with you there is no reason why I should not be perfectly frank.

¹²⁸“The moor is very sparsely inhabited, and those who live near each other are thrown very much together. ¹²⁹For this reason I saw a good deal of Sir Charles Baskerville. ¹³⁰With the exception of Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, and Mr. Stapleton, the naturalist, there are no other men of education within many miles. ¹³¹Sir Charles was a retiring man, but the chance of his illness brought us together, and a community of interests in science kept us so. ¹³²He had brought back much scientific information from South Africa, and many a charming evening we have spent together discussing the comparative anatomy of the Bushman and the Hottentot.

¹³³“Within the last few months it became increasingly plain to me that Sir Charles's nervous system was strained to the breaking point. ¹³⁴He had taken this legend which I have read you exceedingly to heart—so much so that, although he would walk in his own grounds, nothing would induce him to go out upon the moor at night. ¹³⁵Incredible as it may appear to you, Mr. Holmes, he was honestly convinced that a dreadful fate overhung his family, and certainly the records which he was able to give of his ancestors were not encouraging. ¹³⁶The idea of some ghastly presence constantly haunted him, and on more than one occasion he has asked me whether I had on my medical journeys at night ever seen any strange creature or heard the baying of a hound. ¹³⁷The latter question he put to me several times, and always with a voice which vibrated with excitement.

¹³⁸“I can well remember driving up to his house in the evening some three weeks before the fatal event. ¹³⁹He chanced to be at his hall door. ¹⁴⁰I had descended from my gig and was standing in front of him, when I saw his eyes fix themselves over my shoulder, and stare past me with an expression of the most dreadful horror. ¹⁴¹I whisked round and had just time to catch a glimpse of something which I took to be a large black calf passing at the head of the drive. ¹⁴²So excited and alarmed was he that I was compelled to go down to the spot where the animal had been and look around for it. ¹⁴³It was gone, however, and the incident appeared to make the worst impression upon his mind. ¹⁴⁴I stayed with him all the evening, and it was on that occasion, to explain the emotion which he had shown, that he confided to my keeping that narrative which I read to you when first I came. ¹⁴⁵I mention this small episode because it assumes some importance in view of the tragedy which followed, but I was convinced at the time that the matter was entirely trivial and that his excitement had no justification.

¹⁴⁶“It was at my advice that Sir Charles was about to go to London. ¹⁴⁷His heart was, I knew, affected, and the constant anxiety in which he lived, however chimerical the cause of it might be, was evidently having a serious effect upon his health. ¹⁴⁸I thought that a few months among the distractions of town would send him back a new man. ¹⁴⁹Mr. Stapleton, a mutual friend who was much concerned at his state of health, was of the same opinion. ¹⁵⁰At the last instant came this terrible catastrophe.

¹⁵¹“On the night of Sir Charles's death Barrymore the butler, who made the discovery, sent Perkins the groom on horseback to me, and as I was sitting up late I was able to reach Baskerville Hall within an hour of the event. ¹⁵²I checked and corroborated all the facts which were mentioned at the inquest. ¹⁵³I followed the footsteps down the Yew Alley, I saw the spot at the moor-gate where he seemed to have waited, I remarked the change in the shape of the prints after that point, I noted that there were no other

footsteps save those of Barrymore on the soft gravel, and finally I carefully examined the body, which had not been touched until my arrival. ¹⁵⁴Sir Charles lay on his face, his arms out, his fingers dug into the ground, and his features convulsed with some strong emotion to such an extent that I could hardly have sworn to his identity. ¹⁵⁵There was certainly no physical injury of any kind. ¹⁵⁶But one false statement was made by Barrymore at the inquest. ¹⁵⁷He said that there were no traces upon the ground round the body. ¹⁵⁸He did not observe any. ¹⁵⁹But I did—some little distance off, but fresh and clear.”

¹⁶⁰“Footprints?”

¹⁶¹“Footprints.”

¹⁶²“A man's or a woman's?”

¹⁶³Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered:—

¹⁶⁴“Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!”

Chapter III.

The Problem

¹I confess at these words a shudder passed through me. ²There was a thrill in the doctor's voice which showed that he was himself deeply moved by that which he told us. ³Holmes leaned forward in his excitement and his eyes had the hard, dry glitter which shot from them when he was keenly interested.

⁴"You saw this?"

⁵"As clearly as I see you."

⁶"And you said nothing?"

⁷"What was the use?"

⁸"How was it that no one else saw it?"

⁹"The marks were some twenty yards from the body and no one gave them a thought. ¹⁰I don't suppose I should have done so had I not known this legend."

¹¹"There are many sheep-dogs on the moor?"

¹²"No doubt, but this was no sheep-dog."

¹³"You say it was large?"

¹⁴"Enormous."

¹⁵"But it had not approached the body?"

¹⁶"No."

¹⁷"What sort of night was it?"

¹⁸"Damp and raw."

¹⁹"But not actually raining?"

²⁰"No."

²¹"What is the Alley like?"

²²"There are two lines of old yew hedge, twelve feet high and impenetrable. ²³The walk in the centre is about eight feet across."

²⁴"Is there anything between the hedges and the walk?"

²⁵"Yes, there is a strip of grass about six feet broad on either side."

²⁶"I understand that the yew hedge is penetrated at one point by a gate?"

²⁷"Yes, the wicket-gate which leads on to the moor."

²⁸"Is there any other opening?"

²⁹"None."

³⁰“So that to reach the Yew Alley one either has to come down it from the house or else to enter it by the moor-gate?”

³¹“There is an exit through a summer-house at the far end.”

³²“Had Sir Charles reached this?”

³³“No; he lay about fifty yards from it.”

³⁴“Now, tell me, Dr. Mortimer—and this is important—the marks which you saw were on the path and not on the grass?”

³⁵“No marks could show on the grass.”

³⁶“Were they on the same side of the path as the moor-gate?”

³⁷“Yes; they were on the edge of the path on the same side as the moor-gate.”

³⁸“You interest me exceedingly. ³⁹Another point. ⁴⁰Was the wicket-gate closed?”

⁴¹“Closed and padlocked.”

⁴²“How high was it?”

⁴³“About four feet high.”

⁴⁴“Then anyone could have got over it?”

⁴⁵“Yes.”

⁴⁶“And what marks did you see by the wicket-gate?”

⁴⁷“None in particular.”

⁴⁸“Good heaven! ⁴⁹Did no one examine?”

⁵⁰“Yes, I examined myself.”

⁵¹“And found nothing?”

⁵²“It was all very confused. ⁵³Sir Charles had evidently stood there for five or ten minutes.”

⁵⁴“How do you know that?”

⁴⁴“Because the ash had twice dropped from his cigar.”

⁴⁵“Excellent! ⁴⁶This is a colleague, Watson, after our own heart. ⁴⁷But the marks?”

⁴⁸“He had left his own marks all over that small patch of gravel. ⁴⁹I could discern no others.”

⁵⁰Sherlock Holmes struck his hand against his knee with an impatient gesture.

⁵¹“If I had only been there!” he cried. ⁵²“It is evidently a case of extraordinary interest, and one which presented immense opportunities to the scientific expert. ⁵³That gravel patch upon which I might have read so much has been long ere this smudged by the rain and defaced by the clogs of curious peasants. ⁵⁴Oh, Dr. Mortimer, Dr. Mortimer, to think that you should not have called me in! ⁵⁵You have indeed much to answer for.”

⁵⁶“I could not call you in, Mr. Holmes, without disclosing these facts to the world, and I have already given my reasons for not wishing to do so. ⁵⁷Besides, besides—”

⁵⁸“Why do you hesitate?”

⁵⁹“There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless.”

⁶⁰“You mean that the thing is supernatural?”

⁶¹“I did not positively say so.”

⁶²“No, but you evidently think it.”

⁶³“Since the tragedy, Mr. Holmes, there have come to my ears several incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature.”

⁶⁴“For example?”

⁶⁵“I find that before the terrible event occurred several people had seen a creature upon the moor which corresponds with this Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science.

⁶⁶They all agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral. ⁶⁷I have cross-examined these men, one of them a hard-headed countryman, one a farrier, and one a moorland farmer, who all tell the same story of this dreadful apparition, exactly corresponding to the hell-hound of the legend. ⁶⁸I assure you that there is a reign of terror in the district, and that it is a hardy man who will cross the moor at night.”

⁶⁹“And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?”

⁷⁰“I do not know what to believe.”

⁷¹Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

⁷²“I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world,” said he. ⁷³“In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task. ⁷⁴Yet you must admit that the footmark is material.”

⁷⁵“The original hound was material enough to tug a man's throat out, and yet he was diabolical as well.”

⁷⁶“I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists. ⁷⁷But now, Dr. Mortimer, tell me this. ⁷⁸If you hold these views, why have you come to consult me at all? ⁷⁹You tell me in the same breath that it is useless to investigate Sir Charles's death, and that you desire me to do it.”

⁸⁰“I did not say that I desired you to do it.”

⁸¹“Then, how can I assist you?”

⁸²“By advising me as to what I should do with Sir Henry Baskerville, who arrives at Waterloo Station”—Dr. Mortimer looked at his watch—“in exactly one hour and a quarter.”

⁸³“He being the heir?”

⁸⁴“Yes. ⁸⁵On the death of Sir Charles we inquired for this young gentleman and found that he had been farming in Canada. ⁸⁶From the accounts which have reached us he is an excellent fellow in every way.

⁸⁷I speak not as a medical man but as a trustee and executor of Sir Charles's will.”

⁸⁸“There is no other claimant, I presume?”

⁸⁹“None. ⁹⁰The only other kinsman whom we have been able to trace was Rodger Baskerville, the youngest of three brothers of whom poor Sir Charles was the elder. ⁹¹The second brother, who died young, is the father of this lad Henry. ⁹²The third, Rodger, was the black sheep of the family. ⁹³He came of the old masterful Baskerville strain, and was the very image, they tell me, of the family picture of old Hugo. ⁹⁴He made England too hot to hold him, fled to Central America, and died there in 1876 of yellow fever. ⁹⁵Henry is the last of the Baskervilles. ⁹⁶In one hour and five minutes I meet him at

Waterloo Station. ⁹⁷I have had a wire that he arrived at Southampton this morning. ⁹⁸Now, Mr. Holmes, what would you advise me to do with him?"

⁹⁹"Why should he not go to the home of his fathers?"

¹⁰⁰"It seems natural, does it not? ¹⁰¹And yet, consider that every Baskerville who goes there meets with an evil fate. ¹⁰²I feel sure that if Sir Charles could have spoken with me before his death he would have warned me against bringing this, the last of the old race, and the heir to great wealth, to that deadly place. ¹⁰³And yet it cannot be denied that the prosperity of the whole poor, bleak country-side depends upon his presence. ¹⁰⁴All the good work which has been done by Sir Charles will crash to the ground if there is no tenant of the Hall. ¹⁰⁵I fear lest I should be swayed too much by my own obvious interest in the matter, and that is why I bring the case before you and ask for your advice."

¹⁰⁶Holmes considered for a little time.

¹⁰⁷"Put into plain words, the matter is this," said he. ¹⁰⁸"In your opinion there is a diabolical agency which makes Dartmoor an unsafe abode for a Baskerville—that is your opinion?"

¹⁰⁹"At least I might go the length of saying that there is some evidence that this may be so."

¹¹⁰"Exactly. ¹¹¹But surely, if your supernatural theory be correct, it could work the young man evil in London as easily as in Devonshire. ¹¹²A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing."

¹¹³"You put the matter more flippantly, Mr. Holmes, than you would probably do if you were brought into personal contact with these things. ¹¹⁴Your advice, then, as I understand it, is that the young man will be as safe in Devonshire as in London. ¹¹⁵He comes in fifty minutes. ¹¹⁶What would you recommend?"

¹¹⁷"I recommend, sir, that you take a cab, call off your spaniel who is scratching at my front door, and proceed to Waterloo to meet Sir Henry Baskerville."

¹¹⁸"And then?"

¹¹⁹"And then you will say nothing to him at all until I have made up my mind about the matter."

¹²⁰"How long will it take you to make up your mind?"

¹²¹"Twenty-four hours. ¹²²At ten o'clock to-morrow, Dr. Mortimer, I will be much obliged to you if you will call upon me here, and it will be of help to me in my plans for the future if you will bring Sir Henry Baskerville with you."

¹²³"I will do so, Mr. Holmes." ¹²⁴He scribbled the appointment on his shirtcuff and hurried off in his strange, peering, absent-minded fashion. ¹²⁵Holmes stopped him at the head of the stair.

¹²⁶"Only one more question, Dr. Mortimer. ¹²⁷You say that before Sir Charles Baskerville's death several people saw this apparition upon the moor?"

¹²⁸"Three people did."

¹²⁹"Did any see it after?"

¹³⁰"I have not heard of any."

¹³¹"Thank you. ¹³²Good morning."

¹³³Holmes returned to his seat with that quiet look of inward satisfaction which meant that he had a congenial task before him.

¹³⁴“Going out, Watson?”

¹³⁵“Unless I can help you.”

¹³⁶“No, my dear fellow, it is at the hour of action that I turn to you for aid. ¹³⁷But this is splendid, really unique from some points of view. ¹³⁸When you pass Bradley's, would you ask him to send up a pound of the strongest shag tobacco? ¹³⁹Thank you. ¹⁴⁰It would be as well if you could make it convenient not to return before evening. ¹⁴¹Then I should be very glad to compare impressions as to this most interesting problem which has been submitted to us this morning.”

¹⁴²I knew that seclusion and solitude were very necessary for my friend in those hours of intense mental concentration during which he weighed every particle of evidence, constructed alternative theories, balanced one against the other, and made up his mind as to which points were essential and which immaterial. ¹⁴³I therefore spent the day at my club and did not return to Baker Street until evening. ¹⁴⁴It was nearly nine o'clock when I found myself in the sitting-room once more.

¹⁴⁵My first impression as I opened the door was that a fire had broken out, for the room was so filled with smoke that the light of the lamp upon the table was blurred by it. ¹⁴⁶As I entered, however, my fears were set at rest, for it was the acrid fumes of strong coarse tobacco which took me by the throat and set me coughing. ¹⁴⁷Through the haze I had a vague vision of Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips. ¹⁴⁸Several rolls of paper lay around him.

¹⁴⁹“Caught cold, Watson?” said he.

¹⁵⁰“No, it's this poisonous atmosphere.”

¹⁵¹“I suppose it is pretty thick, now that you mention it.”

¹⁵²“Thick! ¹⁵³It is intolerable.”

¹⁵⁴“Open the window, then! ¹⁵⁵You have been at your club all day, I perceive.”

¹⁵⁶“My dear Holmes!”

¹⁵⁷“Am I right?”

¹⁵⁸“Certainly, but how?”

¹⁵⁹He laughed at my bewildered expression.

¹⁶⁰“There is a delightful freshness about you, Watson, which makes it a pleasure to exercise any small powers which I possess at your expense. ¹⁶¹A gentleman goes forth on a showery and miry day. ¹⁶²He returns immaculate in the evening with the gloss still on his hat and his boots. ¹⁶³He has been a fixture therefore all day. ¹⁶⁴He is not a man with intimate friends. ¹⁶⁵Where, then, could he have been? ¹⁶⁶Is it not obvious?”

¹⁶⁷“Well, it is rather obvious.”

¹⁶⁸“The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes. ¹⁶⁹Where do you think that I have been?”

¹⁷⁰“A fixture also.”

¹⁷¹“On the contrary, I have been to Devonshire.”

¹⁷²“In spirit?”

¹⁷³“Exactly. ¹⁷⁴My body has remained in this arm-chair and has, I regret to observe, consumed in my absence two large pots of coffee and an incredible amount of tobacco. ¹⁷⁵After you left I sent down to

Stamford's for the Ordnance map of this portion of the moor, and my spirit has hovered over it all day.
¹⁷⁶I flatter myself that I could find my way about."

¹⁷⁷"A large scale map, I presume?"

¹⁷⁸"Very large." ¹⁷⁹He unrolled one section and held it over his knee. ¹⁸⁰"Here you have the particular district which concerns us. ¹⁸¹That is Baskerville Hall in the middle."

¹⁸²"With a wood round it?"

¹⁸³"Exactly. ¹⁸⁴I fancy the Yew Alley, though not marked under that name, must stretch along this line, with the moor, as you perceive, upon the right of it. ¹⁸⁵This small clump of buildings here is the hamlet of Grimpen, where our friend Dr. Mortimer has his headquarters. ¹⁸⁶Within a radius of five miles there are, as you see, only a very few scattered dwellings. ¹⁸⁷Here is Lafter Hall, which was mentioned in the narrative. ¹⁸⁸There is a house indicated here which may be the residence of the naturalist—Stapleton, if I remember right, was his name. ¹⁸⁹Here are two moorland farm-houses, High Tor and Foulmire. ¹⁹⁰Then fourteen miles away the great convict prison of Princetown. ¹⁹¹Between and around these scattered points extends the desolate, lifeless moor. ¹⁹²This, then, is the stage upon which tragedy has been played, and upon which we may help to play it again."

¹⁹³"It must be a wild place."

¹⁹⁴"Yes, the setting is a worthy one. ¹⁹⁵If the devil did desire to have a hand in the affairs of men—"

¹⁹⁶"Then you are yourself inclining to the supernatural explanation."

¹⁹⁷"The devil's agents may be of flesh and blood, may they not? ¹⁹⁸There are two questions waiting for us at the outset. ¹⁹⁹The one is whether any crime has been committed at all; the second is, what is the crime and how was it committed? ²⁰⁰Of course, if Dr. Mortimer's surmise should be correct, and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our investigation. ²⁰¹But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back upon this one. ²⁰²I think we'll shut that window again, if you don't mind. ²⁰³It is a singular thing, but I find that a concentrated atmosphere helps a concentration of thought. ²⁰⁴I have not pushed it to the length of getting into a box to think, but that is the logical outcome of my convictions. ²⁰⁵Have you turned the case over in your mind?"

²⁰⁶"Yes, I have thought a good deal of it in the course of the day."

²⁰⁷"What do you make of it?"

²⁰⁸"It is very bewildering."

²⁰⁹"It has certainly a character of its own. ²¹⁰There are points of distinction about it. ²¹¹That change in the footprints, for example. ²¹²What do you make of that?"

²¹³"Mortimer said that the man had walked on tiptoe down that portion of the alley."

²¹⁴"He only repeated what some fool had said at the inquest. ²¹⁵Why should a man walk on tiptoe down the alley?"

²¹⁶"What then?"

²¹⁷"He was running, Watson—running desperately, running for his life, running until he burst his heart and fell dead upon his face."

²¹⁸"Running from what?"

²¹⁹"There lies our problem. ²²⁰There are indications that the man was crazed with fear before ever he began to run."

²²¹“How can you say that?”

²²²“I am presuming that the cause of his fears came to him across the moor. ²²³If that were so, and it seems most probable, only a man who had lost his wits would have run from the house instead of towards it. ²²⁴If the gipsy's evidence may be taken as true, he ran with cries for help in the direction where help was least likely to be. ²²⁵Then, again, whom was he waiting for that night, and why was he waiting for him in the Yew Alley rather than in his own house?”

²²⁶“You think that he was waiting for someone?”

²²⁷“The man was elderly and infirm. ²²⁸We can understand his taking an evening stroll, but the ground was damp and the night inclement. ²²⁹Is it natural that he should stand for five or ten minutes, as Dr. Mortimer, with more practical sense than I should have given him credit for, deduced from the cigar ash?”

²³⁰“But he went out every evening.”

²³¹“I think it unlikely that he waited at the moor-gate every evening. ²³²On the contrary, the evidence is that he avoided the moor. ²³³That night he waited there. ²³⁴It was the night before he made his departure for London. ²³⁵The thing takes shape, Watson. ²³⁶It becomes coherent. ²³⁷Might I ask you to hand me my violin, and we will postpone all further thought upon this business until we have had the advantage of meeting Dr. Mortimer and Sir Henry Baskerville in the morning.”

Chapter IV.

Sir Henry Baskerville

¹Our breakfast-table was cleared early, and Holmes waited in his dressing-gown for the promised interview. ²Our clients were punctual to their appointment, for the clock had just struck ten when Dr. Mortimer was shown up, followed by the young baronet. ³The latter was a small, alert, dark-eyed man about thirty years of age, very sturdily built, with thick black eyebrows and a strong, pugnacious face. ⁴He wore a ruddy-tinted tweed suit and had the weather-beaten appearance of one who has spent most of his time in the open air, and yet there was something in his steady eye and the quiet assurance of his bearing which indicated the gentleman.

⁵"This is Sir Henry Baskerville," said Dr. Mortimer.

⁶"Why, yes," said he, "and the strange thing is, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, that if my friend here had not proposed coming round to you this morning I should have come on my own account. ⁷I understand that you think out little puzzles, and I've had one this morning which wants more thinking out than I am able to give it."

⁸"Pray take a seat, Sir Henry. ⁹Do I understand you to say that you have yourself had some remarkable experience since you arrived in London?"

¹⁰"Nothing of much importance, Mr. Holmes. ¹¹Only a joke, as like as not. ¹²It was this letter, if you can call it a letter, which reached me this morning."

¹³He laid an envelope upon the table, and we all bent over it. ¹⁴It was of common quality, grayish in colour. ¹⁵The address, "Sir Henry Baskerville, Northumberland Hotel," was printed in rough characters; the postmark "Charing Cross," and the date of posting the preceding evening.

¹⁶"Who knew that you were going to the Northumberland Hotel?" asked Holmes, glancing keenly across at our visitor.

¹⁷"No one could have known. ¹⁸We only decided after I met Dr. Mortimer."

¹⁹"But Dr. Mortimer was no doubt already stopping there?"

²⁰"No, I had been staying with a friend," said the doctor. ²¹"There was no possible indication that we intended to go to this hotel."

²²"Hum! ²³Someone seems to be very deeply interested in your movements." ²⁴Out of the envelope he took a half-sheet of foolscap paper folded into four. ²⁵This he opened and spread flat upon the table. ²⁶Across the middle of it a single sentence had been formed by the expedient of pasting printed words upon it. ²⁷It ran:

²⁸As you value your life or your reason keep away from the moor.

²⁹The word "moor" only was printed in ink.

³⁰"Now," said Sir Henry Baskerville, "perhaps you will tell me, Mr. Holmes, what in thunder is the meaning of that, and who it is that takes so much interest in my affairs?"

³¹"What do you make of it, Dr. Mortimer? ³²You must allow that there is nothing supernatural about this, at any rate?"

³³“No, sir, but it might very well come from someone who was convinced that the business is supernatural.”

³⁴“What business?” asked Sir Henry sharply. ³⁵“It seems to me that all you gentlemen know a great deal more than I do about my own affairs.”

³⁶“You shall share our knowledge before you leave this room, Sir Henry. ³⁷I promise you that,” said Sherlock Holmes. ³⁸“We will confine ourselves for the present with your permission to this very interesting document, which must have been put together and posted yesterday evening. ³⁹Have you yesterday's Times, Watson?”

⁴⁰“It is here in the corner.”

⁴¹“Might I trouble you for it—the inside page, please, with the leading articles?” ⁴²He glanced swiftly over it, running his eyes up and down the columns. ⁴³“Capital article this on free trade. ⁴⁴Permit me to give you an extract from it.

⁴⁵“You may be cajoled into imagining that your own special trade or your own industry will be encouraged by a protective tariff, but it stands to reason that such legislation must in the long run keep away wealth from the country, diminish the value of our imports, and lower the general conditions of life in this island.”

⁴⁶“What do you think of that, Watson?” cried Holmes in high glee, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction. ⁴⁷“Don't you think that is an admirable sentiment?”

⁴⁸Dr. Mortimer looked at Holmes with an air of professional interest, and Sir Henry Baskerville turned a pair of puzzled dark eyes upon me.

⁴⁹“I don't know much about the tariff and things of that kind,” said he; “but it seems to me we've got a bit off the trail so far as that note is concerned.”

⁵⁰“On the contrary, I think we are particularly hot upon the trail, Sir Henry. ⁵¹Watson here knows more about my methods than you do, but I fear that even he has not quite grasped the significance of this sentence.”

⁵²“No, I confess that I see no connection.”

⁵³“And yet, my dear Watson, there is so very close a connection that the one is extracted out of the other. ⁵⁴‘You,’ ‘your,’ ‘your,’ ‘life,’ ‘reason,’ ‘value,’ ‘keep away,’ ‘from the.’ ⁵⁵Don't you see now whence these words have been taken?”

⁵⁶“By thunder, you're right! ⁵⁷Well, if that isn't smart!” cried Sir Henry.

⁵⁸“If any possible doubt remained it is settled by the fact that ‘keep away’ and ‘from the’ are cut out in one piece.”

⁵⁹“Well, now—so it is!”

⁶⁰“Really, Mr. Holmes, this exceeds anything which I could have imagined,” said Dr. Mortimer, gazing at my friend in amazement. ⁶¹“I could understand anyone saying that the words were from a newspaper; but that you should name which, and add that it came from the leading article, is really one of the most remarkable things which I have ever known. ⁶²How did you do it?”

⁶³“I presume, Doctor, that you could tell the skull of a negro from that of an Esquimau?”

⁶⁴“Most certainly.”

⁶⁵“But how?”

⁶⁶“Because that is my special hobby. ⁶⁷The differences are obvious. ⁶⁸The supra-orbital crest, the facial angle, the maxillary curve, the—”

⁶⁹“But this is my special hobby, and the differences are equally obvious. ⁷⁰There is as much difference to my eyes between the leaded bourgeois type of a Times article and the slovenly print of an evening half-penny paper as there could be between your negro and your Esquimau. ⁷¹The detection of types is one of the most elementary branches of knowledge to the special expert in crime, though I confess that once when I was very young I confused the Leeds Mercury with the Western Morning News. ⁷²But a Times leader is entirely distinctive, and these words could have been taken from nothing else. ⁷³As it was done yesterday the strong probability was that we should find the words in yesterday's issue.”

⁷⁴“So far as I can follow you, then, Mr. Holmes,” said Sir Henry Baskerville, “someone cut out this message with a scissors—”

⁷⁵“Nail-scissors,” said Holmes. ⁷⁶“You can see that it was a very short-bladed scissors, since the cutter had to take two snips over ‘keep away.’”

⁷⁷“That is so. ⁷⁸Someone, then, cut out the message with a pair of short-bladed scissors, pasted it with paste—”

⁷⁹“Gum,” said Holmes.

⁸⁰“With gum on to the paper. ⁸¹But I want to know why the word ‘moor’ should have been written?”

⁸²“Because he could not find it in print. ⁸³The other words were all simple and might be found in any issue, but ‘moor’ would be less common.”

⁸⁴“Why, of course, that would explain it. ⁸⁵Have you read anything else in this message, Mr. Holmes?”

⁸⁶“There are one or two indications, and yet the utmost pains have been taken to remove all clues. ⁸⁷The address, you observe is printed in rough characters. ⁸⁸But the Times is a paper which is seldom found in any hands but those of the highly educated. ⁸⁹We may take it, therefore, that the letter was composed by an educated man who wished to pose as an uneducated one, and his effort to conceal his own writing suggests that that writing might be known, or come to be known, by you. ⁹⁰Again, you will observe that the words are not gummed on in an accurate line, but that some are much higher than others. ⁹¹‘Life,’ for example is quite out of its proper place. ⁹²That may point to carelessness or it may point to agitation and hurry upon the part of the cutter. ⁹³On the whole I incline to the latter view, since the matter was evidently important, and it is unlikely that the composer of such a letter would be careless. ⁹⁴If he were in a hurry it opens up the interesting question why he should be in a hurry, since any letter posted up to early morning would reach Sir Henry before he would leave his hotel. ⁹⁵Did the composer fear an interruption—and from whom?”

⁹⁶“We are coming now rather into the region of guesswork,” said Dr. Mortimer.

⁹⁷“Say, rather, into the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. ⁹⁸It is the scientific use of the imagination, but we have always some material basis on which to start our speculation. ⁹⁹Now, you would call it a guess, no doubt, but I am almost certain that this address has been written in a hotel.”

¹⁰⁰“How in the world can you say that?”

¹⁰¹“If you examine it carefully you will see that both the pen and the ink have given the writer trouble.

¹⁰²The pen has spluttered twice in a single word, and has run dry three times in a short address, showing that there was very little ink in the bottle. ¹⁰³Now, a private pen or ink-bottle is seldom allowed to be in such a state, and the combination of the two must be quite rare. ¹⁰⁴But you know the hotel ink and the hotel pen, where it is rare to get anything else. ¹⁰⁵Yes, I have very little hesitation in saying that could

we examine the waste-paper baskets of the hotels around Charing Cross until we found the remains of the mutilated Times leader we could lay our hands straight upon the person who sent this singular message. ¹⁰⁶Halloa! ¹⁰⁷Halloa! ¹⁰⁸What's this?"

¹⁰⁹He was carefully examining the foolscap, upon which the words were pasted, holding it only an inch or two from his eyes.

¹¹⁰"Well?"

¹¹¹"Nothing," said he, throwing it down. ¹¹²"It is a blank half-sheet of paper, without even a water-mark upon it. ¹¹³I think we have drawn as much as we can from this curious letter; and now, Sir Henry, has anything else of interest happened to you since you have been in London?"

¹¹⁴"Why, no, Mr. Holmes. ¹¹⁵I think not."

¹¹⁶"You have not observed anyone follow or watch you?"

¹¹⁷"I seem to have walked right into the thick of a dime novel," said our visitor. ¹¹⁸"Why in thunder should anyone follow or watch me?"

¹¹⁹"We are coming to that. ¹²⁰You have nothing else to report to us before we go into this matter?"

¹²¹"Well, it depends upon what you think worth reporting."

¹²²"I think anything out of the ordinary routine of life well worth reporting."

¹²³Sir Henry smiled.

¹²⁴"I don't know much of British life yet, for I have spent nearly all my time in the States and in Canada.

¹²⁵But I hope that to lose one of your boots is not part of the ordinary routine of life over here."

¹²⁶"You have lost one of your boots?"

¹²⁷"My dear sir," cried Dr. Mortimer, "it is only mislaid. ¹²⁸You will find it when you return to the hotel.

¹²⁹What is the use of troubling Mr. Holmes with trifles of this kind?"

¹³⁰"Well, he asked me for anything outside the ordinary routine."

¹³¹"Exactly," said Holmes, "however foolish the incident may seem. ¹³²You have lost one of your boots, you say?"

¹³³"Well, mislaid it, anyhow. ¹³⁴I put them both outside my door last night, and there was only one in the morning. ¹³⁵I could get no sense out of the chap who cleans them. ¹³⁶The worst of it is that I only bought the pair last night in the Strand, and I have never had them on."

¹³⁷"If you have never worn them, why did you put them out to be cleaned?"

¹³⁸"They were tan boots and had never been varnished. ¹³⁹That was why I put them out."

¹⁴⁰"Then I understand that on your arrival in London yesterday you went out at once and bought a pair of boots?"

¹⁴¹"I did a good deal of shopping. ¹⁴²Dr. Mortimer here went round with me. ¹⁴³You see, if I am to be squire down there I must dress the part, and it may be that I have got a little careless in my ways out West. ¹⁴⁴Among other things I bought these brown boots—gave six dollars for them—and had one stolen before ever I had them on my feet."

¹⁴⁵"It seems a singularly useless thing to steal," said Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁴⁶"I confess that I share Dr. Mortimer's belief that it will not be long before the missing boot is found."

¹⁴⁷“And, now, gentlemen,” said the baronet with decision, “it seems to me that I have spoken quite enough about the little that I know. ¹⁴⁸It is time that you kept your promise and gave me a full account of what we are all driving at.”

¹⁴⁹“Your request is a very reasonable one,” Holmes answered. ¹⁵⁰“Dr. Mortimer, I think you could not do better than to tell your story as you told it to us.”

¹⁵¹Thus encouraged, our scientific friend drew his papers from his pocket, and presented the whole case as he had done upon the morning before. ¹⁵²Sir Henry Baskerville listened with the deepest attention, and with an occasional exclamation of surprise.

¹⁵³“Well, I seem to have come into an inheritance with a vengeance,” said he when the long narrative was finished. ¹⁵⁴“Of course, I’ve heard of the hound ever since I was in the nursery. ¹⁵⁵It’s the pet story of the family, though I never thought of taking it seriously before. ¹⁵⁶But as to my uncle’s death—well, it all seems boiling up in my head, and I can’t get it clear yet. ¹⁵⁷You don’t seem quite to have made up your mind whether it’s a case for a policeman or a clergyman.”

¹⁵⁸“Precisely.”

¹⁵⁹“And now there’s this affair of the letter to me at the hotel. ¹⁶⁰I suppose that fits into its place.”

¹⁶¹“It seems to show that someone knows more than we do about what goes on upon the moor,” said Dr. Mortimer.

¹⁶²“And also,” said Holmes, “that someone is not ill-disposed towards you, since they warn you of danger.”

¹⁶³“Or it may be that they wish, for their own purposes, to scare me away.”

¹⁶⁴“Well, of course, that is possible also. ¹⁶⁵I am very much indebted to you, Dr. Mortimer, for introducing me to a problem which presents several interesting alternatives. ¹⁶⁶But the practical point which we now have to decide, Sir Henry, is whether it is or is not advisable for you to go to Baskerville Hall.”

¹⁶⁷“Why should I not go?”

¹⁶⁸“There seems to be danger.”

¹⁶⁹“Do you mean danger from this family fiend or do you mean danger from human beings?”

¹⁷⁰“Well, that is what we have to find out.”

¹⁷¹“Whichever it is, my answer is fixed. ¹⁷²There is no devil in hell, Mr. Holmes, and there is no man upon earth who can prevent me from going to the home of my own people, and you may take that to be my final answer.” ¹⁷³His dark brows knitted and his face flushed to a dusky red as he spoke. ¹⁷⁴It was evident that the fiery temper of the Baskervilles was not extinct in this their last representative. ¹⁷⁵“Meanwhile,” said he, “I have hardly had time to think over all that you have told me. ¹⁷⁶It’s a big thing for a man to have to understand and to decide at one sitting. ¹⁷⁷I should like to have a quiet hour by myself to make up my mind. ¹⁷⁸Now, look here, Mr. Holmes, it’s half-past eleven now and I am going back right away to my hotel. ¹⁷⁹Suppose you and your friend, Dr. Watson, come round and lunch with us at two. ¹⁸⁰I’ll be able to tell you more clearly than how this thing strikes me.”

¹⁸¹“Is that convenient to you, Watson?”

¹⁸²“Perfectly.”

¹⁸³“Then you may expect us. ¹⁸⁴Shall I have a cab called?”

¹⁸⁵“I'd prefer to walk, for this affair has flurried me rather.”

¹⁸⁶“I'll join you in a walk, with pleasure,” said his companion.

¹⁸⁷“Then we meet again at two o'clock. ¹⁸⁸Au revoir, and good-morning!”

¹⁸⁹We heard the steps of our visitors descend the stair and the bang of the front door. ¹⁹⁰In an instant Holmes had changed from the languid dreamer to the man of action.

¹⁹¹“Your hat and boots, Watson, quick! ¹⁹²Not a moment to lose!” ¹⁹³He rushed into his room in his dressing-gown and was back again in a few seconds in a frock-coat. ¹⁹⁴We hurried together down the stairs and into the street. ¹⁹⁵Dr. Mortimer and Baskerville were still visible about two hundred yards ahead of us in the direction of Oxford Street.

¹⁹⁶“Shall I run on and stop them?”

¹⁹⁷“Not for the world, my dear Watson. ¹⁹⁸I am perfectly satisfied with your company if you will tolerate mine. ¹⁹⁹Our friends are wise, for it is certainly a very fine morning for a walk.”

²⁰⁰He quickened his pace until we had decreased the distance which divided us by about half. ²⁰¹Then, still keeping a hundred yards behind, we followed into Oxford Street and so down Regent Street. ²⁰²Once our friends stopped and stared into a shop window, upon which Holmes did the same. ²⁰³An instant afterwards he gave a little cry of satisfaction, and, following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw that a hansom cab with a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street was now proceeding slowly onward again.

²⁰⁴“There's our man, Watson! ²⁰⁵Come along! ²⁰⁶We'll have a good look at him, if we can do no more.”

²⁰⁷At that instant I was aware of a bushy black beard and a pair of piercing eyes turned upon us through the side window of the cab. ²⁰⁸Instantly the trapdoor at the top flew up, something was screamed to the driver, and the cab flew madly off down Regent Street. ²⁰⁹Holmes looked eagerly round for another, but no empty one was in sight. ²¹⁰Then he dashed in wild pursuit amid the stream of the traffic, but the start was too great, and already the cab was out of sight.

²¹¹“There now!” said Holmes bitterly as he emerged panting and white with vexation from the tide of vehicles. ²¹²“Was ever such bad luck and such bad management, too? ²¹³Watson, Watson, if you are an honest man you will record this also and set it against my successes!”

²¹⁴“Who was the man?”

²¹⁵“I have not an idea.”

²¹⁶“A spy?”

²¹⁷“Well, it was evident from what we have heard that Baskerville has been very closely shadowed by someone since he has been in town. ²¹⁸How else could it be known so quickly that it was the Northumberland Hotel which he had chosen? ²¹⁹If they had followed him the first day I argued that they would follow him also the second. ²²⁰You may have observed that I twice strolled over to the window while Dr. Mortimer was reading his legend.”

²²¹“Yes, I remember.”

²²²“I was looking out for loiterers in the street, but I saw none. ²²³We are dealing with a clever man, Watson. ²²⁴This matter cuts very deep, and though I have not finally made up my mind whether it is a benevolent or a malevolent agency which is in touch with us, I am conscious always of power and design. ²²⁵When our friends left I at once followed them in the hopes of marking down their invisible attendant. ²²⁶So wily was he that he had not trusted himself upon foot, but he had availed himself of a

cab so that he could loiter behind or dash past them and so escape their notice. ²²⁷His method had the additional advantage that if they were to take a cab he was all ready to follow them. ²²⁸It has, however, one obvious disadvantage.”

²²⁹“It puts him in the power of the cabman.”

²³⁰“Exactly.”

²³¹“What a pity we did not get the number!”

²³²“My dear Watson, clumsy as I have been, you surely do not seriously imagine that I neglected to get the number? ²³³No. 2704 is our man. ²³⁴But that is no use to us for the moment.”

²³⁵“I fail to see how you could have done more.”

²³⁶“On observing the cab I should have instantly turned and walked in the other direction. ²³⁷I should then at my leisure have hired a second cab and followed the first at a respectful distance, or, better still, have driven to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there. ²³⁸When our unknown had followed Baskerville home we should have had the opportunity of playing his own game upon himself and seeing where he made for. ²³⁹As it is, by an indiscreet eagerness, which was taken advantage of with extraordinary quickness and energy by our opponent, we have betrayed ourselves and lost our man.”

²⁴⁰We had been sauntering slowly down Regent Street during this conversation, and Dr. Mortimer, with his companion, had long vanished in front of us.

²⁴¹“There is no object in our following them,” said Holmes. ²⁴²“The shadow has departed and will not return. ²⁴³We must see what further cards we have in our hands and play them with decision. ²⁴⁴Could you swear to that man's face within the cab?”

²⁴⁵“I could swear only to the beard.”

²⁴⁶“And so could I—from which I gather that in all probability it was a false one. ²⁴⁷A clever man upon so delicate an errand has no use for a beard save to conceal his features. ²⁴⁸Come in here, Watson!”

²⁴⁹He turned into one of the district messenger offices, where he was warmly greeted by the manager.

²⁵⁰“Ah, Wilson, I see you have not forgotten the little case in which I had the good fortune to help you?”

²⁵¹“No, sir, indeed I have not. ²⁵²You saved my good name, and perhaps my life.”

²⁵³“My dear fellow, you exaggerate. ²⁵⁴I have some recollection, Wilson, that you had among your boys a lad named Cartwright, who showed some ability during the investigation.”

²⁵⁵“Yes, sir, he is still with us.”

²⁵⁶“Could you ring him up?—thank you! ²⁵⁷And I should be glad to have change of this five-pound note.”

²⁵⁸A lad of fourteen, with a bright, keen face, had obeyed the summons of the manager. ²⁵⁹He stood now gazing with great reverence at the famous detective.

²⁶⁰“Let me have the Hotel Directory,” said Holmes. ²⁶¹“Thank you! ²⁶²Now, Cartwright, there are the names of twenty-three hotels here, all in the immediate neighbourhood of Charing Cross. ²⁶³Do you see?”

²⁶⁴“Yes, sir.”

²⁶⁵“You will visit each of these in turn.”

²⁶⁶“Yes, sir.”

²⁶⁷“You will begin in each case by giving the outside porter one shilling. ²⁶⁸Here are twenty-three shillings.”

²⁶⁹“Yes, sir.”

²⁷⁰“You will tell him that you want to see the waste-paper of yesterday. ²⁷¹You will say that an important telegram has miscarried and that you are looking for it. ²⁷²You understand?”

²⁷³“Yes, sir.”

²⁷⁴“But what you are really looking for is the centre page of the Times with some holes cut in it with scissors. ²⁷⁵Here is a copy of the Times. ²⁷⁶It is this page. ²⁷⁷You could easily recognize it, could you not?”

²⁷⁸“Yes, sir.”

²⁷⁹“In each case the outside porter will send for the hall porter, to whom also you will give a shilling. ²⁸⁰Here are twenty-three shillings. ²⁸¹You will then learn in possibly twenty cases out of the twenty-three that the waste of the day before has been burned or removed. ²⁸²In the three other cases you will be shown a heap of paper and you will look for this page of the Times among it. ²⁸³The odds are enormously against your finding it. ²⁸⁴There are ten shillings over in case of emergencies. ²⁸⁵Let me have a report by wire at Baker Street before evening. ²⁸⁶And now, Watson, it only remains for us to find out by wire the identity of the cabman, No. 2704, and then we will drop into one of the Bond Street picture galleries and fill in the time until we are due at the hotel.”

Chapter V.

Three Broken Threads

¹Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will. ²For two hours the strange business in which we had been involved appeared to be forgotten, and he was entirely absorbed in the pictures of the modern Belgian masters. ³He would talk of nothing but art, of which he had the crudest ideas, from our leaving the gallery until we found ourselves at the Northumberland Hotel.

⁴"Sir Henry Baskerville is upstairs expecting you," said the clerk. ⁵"He asked me to show you up at once when you came."

⁶"Have you any objection to my looking at your register?" said Holmes.

⁷"Not in the least."

⁸The book showed that two names had been added after that of Baskerville. ⁹One was Theophilus Johnson and family, of Newcastle; the other Mrs. Oldmore and maid, of High Lodge, Alton.

¹⁰"Surely that must be the same Johnson whom I used to know," said Holmes to the porter. ¹¹"A lawyer, is he not, gray-headed, and walks with a limp?"

¹²"No, sir; this is Mr. Johnson, the coal-owner, a very active gentleman, not older than yourself."

¹³"Surely you are mistaken about his trade?"

¹⁴"No, sir! he has used this hotel for many years, and he is very well known to us."

¹⁵"Ah, that settles it. ¹⁶Mrs. Oldmore, too; I seem to remember the name. ¹⁷Excuse my curiosity, but often in calling upon one friend one finds another."

¹⁸"She is an invalid lady, sir. ¹⁹Her husband was once mayor of Gloucester. ²⁰She always comes to us when she is in town."

²¹"Thank you; I am afraid I cannot claim her acquaintance. ²²We have established a most important fact by these questions, Watson," he continued in a low voice as we went upstairs together. ²³"We know now that the people who are so interested in our friend have not settled down in his own hotel. ²⁴That means that while they are, as we have seen, very anxious to watch him, they are equally anxious that he should not see them. ²⁵Now, this is a most suggestive fact."

²⁶"What does it suggest?"

²⁷"It suggests—halloa, my dear fellow, what on earth is the matter?"

²⁸As we came round the top of the stairs we had run up against Sir Henry Baskerville himself. ²⁹His face was flushed with anger, and he held an old and dusty boot in one of his hands. ³⁰So furious was he that he was hardly articulate, and when he did speak it was in a much broader and more Western dialect than any which we had heard from him in the morning.

³¹"Seems to me they are playing me for a sucker in this hotel," he cried. ³²"They'll find they've started in to monkey with the wrong man unless they are careful. ³³By thunder, if that chap can't find my missing boot there will be trouble. ³⁴I can take a joke with the best, Mr. Holmes, but they've got a bit over the mark this time."

³⁵"Still looking for your boot?"

³⁶“Yes, sir, and mean to find it.”

³⁷“But, surely, you said that it was a new brown boot?”

³⁸“So it was, sir. ³⁹And now it's an old black one.”

⁴⁰“What! you don't mean to say—?”

⁴¹“That's just what I do mean to say. ⁴²I only had three pairs in the world—the new brown, the old black, and the patent leathers, which I am wearing. ⁴³Last night they took one of my brown ones, and to-day they have sneaked one of the black. ⁴⁴Well, have you got it? ⁴⁵Speak out, man, and don't stand staring!”

⁴⁶An agitated German waiter had appeared upon the scene.

⁴⁷“No, sir; I have made inquiry all over the hotel, but I can hear no word of it.”

⁴⁸“Well, either that boot comes back before sundown or I'll see the manager and tell him that I go right straight out of this hotel.”

⁴⁹“It shall be found, sir— ⁵⁰I promise you that if you will have a little patience it will be found.”

⁵¹“Mind it is, for it's the last thing of mine that I'll lose in this den of thieves. ⁵²Well, well, Mr. Holmes, you'll excuse my troubling you about such a trifle—”

⁵³“I think it's well worth troubling about.”

⁵⁴“Why, you look very serious over it.”

⁵⁵“How do you explain it?”

⁵⁶“I just don't attempt to explain it. ⁵⁷It seems the very maddest, queerest thing that ever happened to me.”

⁵⁸“The queerest perhaps—” said Holmes, thoughtfully.

⁵⁹“What do you make of it yourself?”

⁶⁰“Well, I don't profess to understand it yet. ⁶¹This case of yours is very complex, Sir Henry. ⁶²When taken in conjunction with your uncle's death I am not sure that of all the five hundred cases of capital importance which I have handled there is one which cuts so deep. ⁶³But we hold several threads in our hands, and the odds are that one or other of them guides us to the truth. ⁶⁴We may waste time in following the wrong one, but sooner or later we must come upon the right.”

⁶⁵We had a pleasant luncheon in which little was said of the business which had brought us together.

⁶⁶It was in the private sitting-room to which we afterwards repaired that Holmes asked Baskerville what were his intentions.

⁶⁷“To go to Baskerville Hall.”

⁶⁸“And when?”

⁶⁹“At the end of the week.”

⁷⁰“On the whole,” said Holmes, “I think that your decision is a wise one. ⁷¹I have ample evidence that you are being dogged in London, and amid the millions of this great city it is difficult to discover who these people are or what their object can be. ⁷²If their intentions are evil they might do you a mischief, and we should be powerless to prevent it. ⁷³You did not know, Dr. Mortimer, that you were followed this morning from my house?”

⁷⁴Dr. Mortimer started violently.

⁷⁵“Followed! ⁷⁶By whom?”

⁷⁷“That, unfortunately, is what I cannot tell you. ⁷⁸Have you among your neighbours or acquaintances on Dartmoor any man with a black, full beard?”

⁷⁹“No—or, let me see—why, yes. Barrymore, Sir Charles's butler, is a man with a full, black beard.”

⁸⁰“Ha! ⁸¹Where is Barrymore?”

⁸²“He is in charge of the Hall.”

⁸³“We had best ascertain if he is really there, or if by any possibility he might be in London.”

⁸⁴“How can you do that?”

⁸⁵“Give me a telegraph form. ⁸⁶Is all ready for Sir Henry?’ ⁸⁷That will do. ⁸⁸Address to Mr. Barrymore, Baskerville Hall. ⁸⁹What is the nearest telegraph-office? ⁹⁰Grimpen. ⁹¹Very good, we will send a second wire to the postmaster, Grimpen: ⁹²‘Telegram to Mr. Barrymore to be delivered into his own hand. ⁹³If absent, please return wire to Sir Henry Baskerville, Northumberland Hotel.’ ⁹⁴That should let us know before evening whether Barrymore is at his post in Devonshire or not.”

⁹⁵“That's so,” said Baskerville. ⁹⁶“By the way, Dr. Mortimer, who is this Barrymore, anyhow?”

⁹⁷“He is the son of the old caretaker, who is dead. ⁹⁸They have looked after the Hall for four generations now. ⁹⁹So far as I know, he and his wife are as respectable a couple as any in the county.”

¹⁰⁰“At the same time,” said Baskerville, “it's clear enough that so long as there are none of the family at the Hall these people have a mighty fine home and nothing to do.”

¹⁰¹“That is true.”

¹⁰²“Did Barrymore profit at all by Sir Charles's will?” asked Holmes.

¹⁰³“He and his wife had five hundred pounds each.”

¹⁰⁴“Ha! ¹⁰⁵Did they know that they would receive this?”

¹⁰⁶“Yes; Sir Charles was very fond of talking about the provisions of his will.”

¹⁰⁷“That is very interesting.”

¹⁰⁸“I hope,” said Dr. Mortimer, “that you do not look with suspicious eyes upon everyone who received a legacy from Sir Charles, for I also had a thousand pounds left to me.”

¹⁰⁹“Indeed! ¹¹⁰And anyone else?”

¹¹¹“There were many insignificant sums to individuals, and a large number of public charities. ¹¹²The residue all went to Sir Henry.”

¹¹³“And how much was the residue?”

¹¹⁴“Seven hundred and forty thousand pounds.”

¹¹⁵Holmes raised his eyebrows in surprise. ¹¹⁶“I had no idea that so gigantic a sum was involved,” said he.

¹¹⁷“Sir Charles had the reputation of being rich, but we did not know how very rich he was until we came to examine his securities. ¹¹⁸The total value of the estate was close on to a million.”

¹¹⁹“Dear me! ¹²⁰It is a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game. ¹²¹And one more question, Dr. Mortimer. ¹²³Supposing that anything happened to our young friend here—you will forgive the unpleasant hypothesis!—who would inherit the estate?”

¹²⁴“Since Rodger Baskerville, Sir Charles's younger brother died unmarried, the estate would descend to the Desmonds, who are distant cousins. ¹²⁵James Desmond is an elderly clergyman in Westmoreland.”

¹²⁶“Thank you. ¹²⁷These details are all of great interest. ¹²⁸Have you met Mr. James Desmond?”

¹²⁹“Yes; he once came down to visit Sir Charles. ¹³⁰He is a man of venerable appearance and of saintly life. ¹³¹I remember that he refused to accept any settlement from Sir Charles, though he pressed it upon him.”

¹³²“And this man of simple tastes would be the heir to Sir Charles's thousands.”

¹³³“He would be the heir to the estate because that is entailed. ¹³⁴He would also be the heir to the money unless it were willed otherwise by the present owner, who can, of course, do what he likes with it.”

¹³⁵“And have you made your will, Sir Henry?”

¹³⁶“No, Mr. Holmes, I have not. ¹³⁷I've had no time, for it was only yesterday that I learned how matters stood. ¹³⁸But in any case I feel that the money should go with the title and estate. ¹³⁹That was my poor uncle's idea. ¹⁴⁰How is the owner going to restore the glories of the Baskervilles if he has not money enough to keep up the property? ¹⁴¹House, land, and dollars must go together.”

¹⁴²“Quite so. ¹⁴³Well, Sir Henry, I am of one mind with you as to the advisability of your going down to Devonshire without delay. ¹⁴⁴There is only one provision which I must make. ¹⁴⁵You certainly must not go alone.”

¹⁴⁶“Dr. Mortimer returns with me.”

¹⁴⁷“But Dr. Mortimer has his practice to attend to, and his house is miles away from yours. ¹⁴⁸With all the good will in the world he may be unable to help you. ¹⁴⁹No, Sir Henry, you must take with you someone, a trusty man, who will be always by your side.”

¹⁵⁰“Is it possible that you could come yourself, Mr. Holmes?”

¹⁵¹“If matters came to a crisis I should endeavour to be present in person; but you can understand that, with my extensive consulting practice and with the constant appeals which reach me from many quarters, it is impossible for me to be absent from London for an indefinite time. ¹⁵²At the present instant one of the most revered names in England is being besmirched by a blackmailer, and only I can stop a disastrous scandal. ¹⁵³You will see how impossible it is for me to go to Dartmoor.”

¹⁵⁴“Whom would you recommend, then?”

¹⁵⁵Holmes laid his hand upon my arm.

¹⁵⁶“If my friend would undertake it there is no man who is better worth having at your side when you are in a tight place. ¹⁵⁷No one can say so more confidently than I.”

¹⁵⁸The proposition took me completely by surprise, but before I had time to answer, Baskerville seized me by the hand and wrung it heartily.

¹⁵⁹“Well, now, that is real kind of you, Dr. Watson,” said he. ¹⁶⁰“You see how it is with me, and you know just as much about the matter as I do. ¹⁶¹If you will come down to Baskerville Hall and see me through I'll never forget it.”

¹⁶²The promise of adventure had always a fascination for me, and I was complimented by the words of Holmes and by the eagerness with which the baronet hailed me as a companion.

¹⁶³"I will come, with pleasure," said I. ¹⁶⁴"I do not know how I could employ my time better."

¹⁶⁵"And you will report very carefully to me," said Holmes. ¹⁶⁶"When a crisis comes, as it will do, I will direct how you shall act. ¹⁶⁷I suppose that by Saturday all might be ready?"

¹⁶⁸"Would that suit Dr. Watson?"

¹⁶⁹"Perfectly."

¹⁷⁰"Then on Saturday, unless you hear to the contrary, we shall meet at the 10.30 train from Paddington."

¹⁷¹We had risen to depart when Baskerville gave a cry, of triumph, and diving into one of the corners of the room he drew a brown boot from under a cabinet.

¹⁷²"My missing boot!" he cried.

¹⁷³"May all our difficulties vanish as easily!" said Sherlock Holmes.

¹⁷⁴"But it is a very singular thing," Dr. Mortimer remarked. ¹⁷⁵"I searched this room carefully before lunch."

¹⁷⁶"And so did I," said Baskerville. ¹⁷⁷"Every inch of it."

¹⁷⁸"There was certainly no boot in it then."

¹⁷⁹"In that case the waiter must have placed it there while we were lunching."

¹⁸⁰The German was sent for but professed to know nothing of the matter, nor could any inquiry clear it up. ¹⁸¹Another item had been added to that constant and apparently purposeless series of small mysteries which had succeeded each other so rapidly. ¹⁸²Setting aside the whole grim story of Sir Charles's death, we had a line of inexplicable incidents all within the limits of two days, which included the receipt of the printed letter, the black-bearded spy in the hansom, the loss of the new brown boot, the loss of the old black boot, and now the return of the new brown boot. ¹⁸³Holmes sat in silence in the cab as we drove back to Baker Street, and I knew from his drawn brows and keen face that his mind, like my own, was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted. ¹⁸⁴All afternoon and late into the evening he sat lost in tobacco and thought.

¹⁸⁵Just before dinner two telegrams were handed in. ¹⁸⁶The first ran:

¹⁸⁷Have just heard that Barrymore is at the Hall.

¹⁸⁸— Baskerville.

¹⁸⁹The second:

¹⁹⁰Visited twenty-three hotels as directed, but sorry to report unable to trace cut sheet of Times.

¹⁹¹— Cartwright.

¹⁹²"There go two of my threads, Watson. ¹⁹³There is nothing more stimulating than a case where everything goes against you. ¹⁹⁴We must cast round for another scent."

¹⁹⁵"We have still the cabman who drove the spy."

¹⁹⁶"Exactly. ¹⁹⁷I have wired to get his name and address from the Official Registry. ¹⁹⁸I should not be surprised if this were an answer to my question."

¹⁹⁹The ring at the bell proved to be something even more satisfactory than an answer, however, for the door opened and a rough-looking fellow entered who was evidently the man himself.

²⁰⁰"I got a message from the head office that a gent at this address had been inquiring for 2704," said he. ²⁰¹"I've driven my cab this seven years and never a word of complaint. ²⁰²I came here straight from the Yard to ask you to your face what you had against me."

²⁰³"I have nothing in the world against you, my good man," said Holmes. ²⁰⁴"On the contrary, I have half a sovereign for you if you will give me a clear answer to my questions."

²⁰⁵"Well, I've had a good day and no mistake," said the cabman, with a grin. ²⁰⁶"What was it you wanted to ask, sir?"

²⁰⁷"First of all your name and address, in case I want you again."

²⁰⁸"John Clayton, 3 Turpey Street, the Borough. ²⁰⁹My cab is out of Shipley's Yard, near Waterloo Station."

²¹⁰Sherlock Holmes made a note of it.

²¹¹"Now, Clayton, tell me all about the fare who came and watched this house at ten o'clock this morning and afterwards followed the two gentlemen down Regent Street."

²¹²The man looked surprised and a little embarrassed. ²¹³"Why, there's no good my telling you things, for you seem to know as much as I do already," said he. ²¹⁴"The truth is that the gentleman told me that he was a detective and that I was to say nothing about him to anyone."

²¹⁵"My good fellow, this is a very serious business, and you may find yourself in a pretty bad position if you try to hide anything from me. ²¹⁶You say that your fare told you that he was a detective?"

²¹⁷"Yes, he did."

²¹⁸"When did he say this?"

²¹⁹"When he left me."

²²⁰"Did he say anything more?"

²²¹"He mentioned his name."

²²²Holmes cast a swift glance of triumph at me. ²²³"Oh, he mentioned his name, did he? ²²⁴That was imprudent. ²²⁵What was the name that he mentioned?"

²²⁶"His name," said the cabman, "was Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

²²⁷Never have I seen my friend more completely taken aback than by the cabman's reply. ²²⁸For an instant he sat in silent amazement. ²²⁹Then he burst into a hearty laugh.

²³⁰"A touch, Watson—an undeniable touch!" said he. ²³¹"I feel a foil as quick and supple as my own.

²³²He got home upon me very prettily that time. ²³³So his name was Sherlock Holmes, was it?"

²³⁴"Yes, sir, that was the gentleman's name."

²³⁵"Excellent! ²³⁶Tell me where you picked him up and all that occurred."

²³⁷"He hailed me at half-past nine in Trafalgar Square. ²³⁸He said that he was a detective, and he offered me two guineas if I would do exactly what he wanted all day and ask no questions. ²³⁹I was glad enough to agree. ²⁴⁰First we drove down to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there until two gentlemen

came out and took a cab from the rank. ²⁴¹We followed their cab until it pulled up somewhere near here.”

²⁴²“This very door,” said Holmes.

²⁴³“Well, I couldn't be sure of that, but I dare say my fare knew all about it. ²⁴⁴We pulled up half-way down the street and waited an hour and a half. ²⁴⁵Then the two gentlemen passed us, walking, and we followed down Baker Street and along—”

²⁴⁶“I know,” said Holmes.

²⁴⁷“Until we got three-quarters down Regent Street. ²⁴⁸Then my gentleman threw up the trap, and he cried that I should drive right away to Waterloo Station as hard as I could go. ²⁴⁹I whipped up the mare and we were there under the ten minutes. ²⁵⁰Then he paid up his two guineas, like a good one, and away he went into the station. ²⁵¹Only just as he was leaving he turned round and he said: ‘It might interest you to know that you have been driving Mr. Sherlock Holmes.’ ²⁵²That's how I come to know the name.”

²⁵³“I see. ²⁵⁴And you saw no more of him?”

²⁵⁵“Not after he went into the station.”

²⁵⁶“And how would you describe Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

²⁵⁷The cabman scratched his head. ²⁵⁸“Well, he wasn't altogether such an easy gentleman to describe. ²⁵⁹I'd put him at forty years of age, and he was of a middle height, two or three inches shorter than you, sir. ²⁶⁰He was dressed like a toff, and he had a black beard, cut square at the end, and a pale face. ²⁶¹I don't know as I could say more than that.”

²⁶²“Colour of his eyes?”

²⁶³“No, I can't say that.”

²⁶⁴“Nothing more that you can remember?”

²⁶⁵“No, sir; nothing.”

²⁶⁶“Well, then, here is your half-sovereign. ²⁶⁷There's another one waiting for you if you can bring any more information. ²⁶⁸Good night!”

²⁶⁹“Good night, sir, and thank you!”

²⁷⁰John Clayton departed chuckling, and Holmes turned to me with a shrug of his shoulders and a rueful smile.

²⁷¹“Snap goes our third thread, and we end where we began,” said he. ²⁷²“The cunning rascal! ²⁷³He knew our number, knew that Sir Henry Baskerville had consulted me, spotted who I was in Regent Street, conjectured that I had got the number of the cab and would lay my hands on the driver, and so sent back this audacious message. ²⁷⁴I tell you, Watson, this time we have got a foeman who is worthy of our steel. ²⁷⁵I've been checkmated in London. ²⁷⁶I can only wish you better luck in Devonshire. ²⁷⁷But I'm not easy in my mind about it.”

²⁷⁸“About what?”

²⁷⁹“About sending you. ²⁸⁰It's an ugly business, Watson, an ugly dangerous business, and the more I see of it the less I like it. ²⁸¹Yes, my dear fellow, you may laugh, but I give you my word that I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more.”

Chapter VI.

Baskerville Hall

¹Sir Henry Baskerville and Dr. Mortimer were ready upon the appointed day, and we started as arranged for Devonshire. ²Mr. Sherlock Holmes drove with me to the station and gave me his last parting injunctions and advice.

³"I will not bias your mind by suggesting theories or suspicions, Watson," said he; "I wish you simply to report facts in the fullest possible manner to me, and you can leave me to do the theorizing."

⁴"What sort of facts?" I asked.

⁵"Anything which may seem to have a bearing however indirect upon the case, and especially the relations between young Baskerville and his neighbours or any fresh particulars concerning the death of Sir Charles. ⁶I have made some inquiries myself in the last few days, but the results have, I fear, been negative. ⁷One thing only appears to be certain, and that is that Mr. James Desmond, who is the next heir, is an elderly gentleman of a very amiable disposition, so that this persecution does not arise from him. ⁸I really think that we may eliminate him entirely from our calculations. ⁹There remain the people who will actually surround Sir Henry Baskerville upon the moor."

¹⁰"Would it not be well in the first place to get rid of this Barrymore couple?"

¹¹"By no means. ¹²You could not make a greater mistake. ¹³If they are innocent it would be a cruel injustice, and if they are guilty we should be giving up all chance of bringing it home to them. ¹⁴No, no, we will preserve them upon our list of suspects. ¹⁵Then there is a groom at the Hall, if I remember right. ¹⁶There are two moorland farmers. ¹⁷There is our friend Dr. Mortimer, whom I believe to be entirely honest, and there is his wife, of whom we know nothing. ¹⁸There is this naturalist, Stapleton, and there is his sister, who is said to be a young lady of attractions. ¹⁹There is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who is also an unknown factor, and there are one or two other neighbours. ²⁰These are the folk who must be your very special study."

²¹"I will do my best."

²²"You have arms, I suppose?"

²³"Yes, I thought it as well to take them."

²⁴"Most certainly. ²⁵Keep your revolver near you night and day, and never relax your precautions."

²⁶Our friends had already secured a first-class carriage and were waiting for us upon the platform.

²⁷"No, we have no news of any kind," said Dr. Mortimer in answer to my friend's questions. ²⁸"I can swear to one thing, and that is that we have not been shadowed during the last two days. ²⁹We have never gone out without keeping a sharp watch, and no one could have escaped our notice."

³⁰"You have always kept together, I presume?"

³¹"Except yesterday afternoon. ³²I usually give up one day to pure amusement when I come to town, so I spent it at the Museum of the College of Surgeons."

³³"And I went to look at the folk in the park," said Baskerville. ³⁴"But we had no trouble of any kind."

³⁵“It was imprudent, all the same,” said Holmes, shaking his head and looking very grave. ³⁶“I beg, Sir Henry, that you will not go about alone. ³⁷Some great misfortune will befall you if you do. ³⁸Did you get your other boot?”

³⁹“No, sir, it is gone forever.”

⁴⁰“Indeed. ⁴¹That is very interesting. ⁴²Well, good-bye,” he added as the train began to glide down the platform. ⁴³“Bear in mind, Sir Henry, one of the phrases in that queer old legend which Dr. Mortimer has read to us, and avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted.”

⁴⁴I looked back at the platform when we had left it far behind, and saw the tall, austere figure of Holmes standing motionless and gazing after us.

⁴⁵The journey was a swift and pleasant one, and I spent it in making the more intimate acquaintance of my two companions and in playing with Dr. Mortimer's spaniel. ⁴⁶In a very few hours the brown earth had become ruddy, the brick had changed to granite, and red cows grazed in well-hedged fields where the lush grasses and more luxuriant vegetation spoke of a richer, if a damper, climate. ⁴⁷Young Baskerville stared eagerly out of the window, and cried aloud with delight as he recognized the familiar features of the Devon scenery.

⁴⁸“I've been over a good part of the world since I left it, Dr. Watson,” said he; “but I have never seen a place to compare with it.”

⁴⁹“I never saw a Devonshire man who did not swear by his county,” I remarked.

⁵⁰“It depends upon the breed of men quite as much as on the county,” said Dr. Mortimer. ⁵¹“A glance at our friend here reveals the rounded head of the Celt, which carries inside it the Celtic enthusiasm and power of attachment. ⁵²Poor Sir Charles's head was of a very rare type, half Gaelic, half Ivernian in its characteristics. ⁵³But you were very young when you last saw Baskerville Hall, were you not?”

⁵⁴“I was a boy in my 'teens at the time of my father's death, and had never seen the Hall, for he lived in a little cottage on the South Coast. ⁵⁵Thence I went straight to a friend in America. ⁵⁶I tell you it is all as new to me as it is to Dr. Watson, and I'm as keen as possible to see the moor.”

⁵⁷“Are you? ⁵⁸Then your wish is easily granted, for there is your first sight of the moor,” said Dr. Mortimer, pointing out of the carriage window.

⁵⁹Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there rose in the distance a gray, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream. ⁶⁰Baskerville sat for a long time, his eyes fixed upon it, and I read upon his eager face how much it meant to him, this first sight of that strange spot where the men of his blood had held sway so long and left their mark so deep. ⁶¹There he sat, with his tweed suit and his American accent, in the corner of a prosaic railway-carriage, and yet as I looked at his dark and expressive face I felt more than ever how true a descendant he was of that long line of high-blooded, fiery, and masterful men. ⁶²There were pride, valour, and strength in his thick brows, his sensitive nostrils, and his large hazel eyes. ⁶³If on that forbidding moor a difficult and dangerous quest should lie before us, this was at least a comrade for whom one might venture to take a risk with the certainty that he would bravely share it.

⁶⁴The train pulled up at a small wayside station and we all descended. ⁶⁵Outside, beyond the low, white fence, a wagonette with a pair of cobs was waiting. ⁶⁶Our coming was evidently a great event, for station-master and porters clustered round us to carry out our luggage. ⁶⁷It was a sweet, simple country spot, but I was surprised to observe that by the gate there stood two soldierly men in dark uniforms, who leaned upon their short rifles and glanced keenly at us as we passed. ⁶⁸The coachman, a hard-faced, gnarled little fellow, saluted Sir Henry Baskerville, and in a few minutes we were flying swiftly down the broad, white road. ⁶⁹Rolling pasture lands curved upward on either side of us, and old gabled houses

peeped out from amid the thick green foliage, but behind the peaceful and sunlit country-side there rose ever, dark against the evening sky, the long, gloomy curve of the moor, broken by the jagged and sinister hills.

⁷⁰The wagonette swung round into a side road, and we curved upward through deep lanes worn by centuries of wheels, high banks on either side, heavy with dripping moss and fleshy hart's-tongue ferns.

⁷¹Bronzing bracken and mottled bramble gleamed in the light of the sinking sun. ⁷²Still steadily rising, we passed over a narrow granite bridge, and skirted a noisy stream which gushed swiftly down, foaming and roaring amid the gray boulders. ⁷³Both road and stream wound up through a valley dense with scrub oak and fir. ⁷⁴At every turn Baskerville gave an exclamation of delight, looking eagerly about him and asking countless questions. ⁷⁵To his eyes all seemed beautiful, but to me a tinge of melancholy lay upon the country-side, which bore so clearly the mark of the waning year. ⁷⁶Yellow leaves carpeted the lanes and fluttered down upon us as we passed. ⁷⁷The rattle of our wheels died away as we drove through drifts of rotting vegetation—sad gifts, as it seemed to me, for Nature to throw before the carriage of the returning heir of the Baskervilles.

⁷⁸“Halloa!” cried Dr. Mortimer, “what is this?”

⁷⁹A steep curve of heath-clad land, an outlying spur of the moor, lay in front of us. ⁸⁰On the summit, hard and clear like an equestrian statue upon its pedestal, was a mounted soldier, dark and stern, his rifle poised ready over his forearm. ⁸¹He was watching the road along which we travelled.

⁸²“What is this, Perkins?” asked Dr. Mortimer.

⁸³Our driver half turned in his seat.

⁸⁴“There's a convict escaped from Princetown, sir. ⁸⁵He's been out three days now, and the warders watch every road and every station, but they've had no sight of him yet. ⁸⁶The farmers about here don't like it, sir, and that's a fact.”

⁸⁷“Well, I understand that they get five pounds if they can give information.”

⁸⁸“Yes, sir, but the chance of five pounds is but a poor thing compared to the chance of having your throat cut. ⁸⁹You see, it isn't like any ordinary convict. ⁹⁰This is a man that would stick at nothing.”

⁹¹“Who is he, then?”

⁹²“It is Selden, the Notting Hill murderer.”

⁹³I remembered the case well, for it was one in which Holmes had taken an interest on account of the peculiar ferocity of the crime and the wanton brutality which had marked all the actions of the assassin.

⁹⁴The commutation of his death sentence had been due to some doubts as to his complete sanity, so atrocious was his conduct. ⁹⁵Our wagonette had topped a rise and in front of us rose the huge expanse of the moor, mottled with gnarled and craggy cairns and tors. ⁹⁶A cold wind swept down from it and set us shivering. ⁹⁷Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, his heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out. ⁹⁸It needed but this to complete the grim suggestiveness of the barren waste, the chilling wind, and the darkling sky. ⁹⁹Even Baskerville fell silent and pulled his overcoat more closely around him.

¹⁰⁰We had left the fertile country behind and beneath us. ¹⁰¹We looked back on it now, the slanting rays of a low sun turning the streams to threads of gold and glowing on the red earth new turned by the plough and the broad tangle of the woodlands. ¹⁰²The road in front of us grew bleaker and wilder over huge russet and olive slopes, sprinkled with giant boulders. ¹⁰³Now and then we passed a moorland cottage, walled and roofed with stone, with no creeper to break its harsh outline. ¹⁰⁴Suddenly we looked down into a cup-like depression, patched with stunted oaks and firs which had been twisted and bent

by the fury of years of storm. ¹⁰⁵Two high, narrow towers rose over the trees. ¹⁰⁶The driver pointed with his whip.

¹⁰⁷“Baskerville Hall,” said he.

¹⁰⁸Its master had risen and was staring with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. ¹⁰⁹A few minutes later we had reached the lodge-gates, a maze of fantastic tracery in wrought iron, with weather-bitten pillars on either side, blotched with lichens, and surmounted by the boars' heads of the Baskervilles. ¹¹⁰The lodge was a ruin of black granite and bared ribs of rafters, but facing it was a new building, half constructed, the first fruit of Sir Charles's South African gold.

¹¹¹Through the gateway we passed into the avenue, where the wheels were again hushed amid the leaves, and the old trees shot their branches in a sombre tunnel over our heads. ¹¹²Baskerville shuddered as he looked up the long, dark drive to where the house glimmered like a ghost at the farther end.

¹¹³“Was it here?” he asked in a low voice.

¹¹⁴“No, no, the Yew Alley is on the other side.”

¹¹⁵The young heir glanced round with a gloomy face.

¹¹⁶“It's no wonder my uncle felt as if trouble were coming on him in such a place as this,” said he. ¹¹⁷“It's enough to scare any man. ¹¹⁸I'll have a row of electric lamps up here inside of six months, and you won't know it again, with a thousand candle-power Swan and Edison right here in front of the hall door.”

¹¹⁹The avenue opened into a broad expanse of turf, and the house lay before us. ¹²⁰In the fading light I could see that the centre was a heavy block of building from which a porch projected. ¹²¹The whole front was draped in ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat-of-arms broke through the dark veil. ¹²²From this central block rose the twin towers, ancient, crenelated, and pierced with many loopholes. ¹²³To right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite. ¹²⁴A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a single black column of smoke.

¹²⁵“Welcome, Sir Henry! ¹²⁶Welcome to Baskerville Hall!”

¹²⁷A tall man had stepped from the shadow of the porch to open the door of the wagonette. ¹²⁸The figure of a woman was silhouetted against the yellow light of the hall. ¹²⁹She came out and helped the man to hand down our bags.

¹³⁰“You don't mind my driving straight home, Sir Henry?” said Dr. Mortimer. ¹³¹“My wife is expecting me.”

¹³²“Surely you will stay and have some dinner?”

¹³³“No, I must go. ¹³⁴I shall probably find some work awaiting me. ¹³⁵I would stay to show you over the house, but Barrymore will be a better guide than I. ¹³⁶Good-bye, and never hesitate night or day to send for me if I can be of service.”

¹³⁷The wheels died away down the drive while Sir Henry and I turned into the hall, and the door clanged heavily behind us. ¹³⁸It was a fine apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavily raftered with huge balks of age-blackened oak. ¹³⁹In the great old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log-fire crackled and snapped. ¹⁴⁰Sir Henry and I held out our hands to it, for we were numb from our long drive. ¹⁴¹Then we gazed round us at the high, thin window of old stained glass, the oak panelling, the stags' heads, the coats-of-arms upon the walls, all dim and sombre in the subdued light of the central lamp.

¹⁴²“It’s just as I imagined it,” said Sir Henry. ¹⁴³“Is it not the very picture of an old family home? ¹⁴⁴To think that this should be the same hall in which for five hundred years my people have lived. ¹⁴⁵It strikes me solemn to think of it.”

¹⁴⁶I saw his dark face lit up with a boyish enthusiasm as he gazed about him. ¹⁴⁷The light beat upon him where he stood, but long shadows trailed down the walls and hung like a black canopy above him. ¹⁴⁸Barrymore had returned from taking our luggage to our rooms. ¹⁴⁹He stood in front of us now with the subdued manner of a well-trained servant. ¹⁵⁰He was a remarkable-looking man, tall, handsome, with a square black beard and pale, distinguished features.

¹⁵¹“Would you wish dinner to be served at once, sir?”

¹⁵²“Is it ready?”

¹⁵³“In a very few minutes, sir. ¹⁵⁴You will find hot water in your rooms. ¹⁵⁵My wife and I will be happy, Sir Henry, to stay with you until you have made your fresh arrangements, but you will understand that under the new conditions this house will require a considerable staff.”

¹⁵⁶“What new conditions?”

¹⁵⁷“I only meant, sir, that Sir Charles led a very retired life, and we were able to look after his wants. ¹⁵⁸You would, naturally, wish to have more company, and so you will need changes in your household.”

¹⁵⁹“Do you mean that your wife and you wish to leave?”

¹⁶⁰“Only when it is quite convenient to you, sir.”

¹⁶¹“But your family have been with us for several generations, have they not? ¹⁶²I should be sorry to begin my life here by breaking an old family connection.”

¹⁶³I seemed to discern some signs of emotion upon the butler’s white face.

¹⁶⁴“I feel that also, sir, and so does my wife. ¹⁶⁵But to tell the truth, sir, we were both very much attached to Sir Charles, and his death gave us a shock and made these surroundings very painful to us. ¹⁶⁶I fear that we shall never again be easy in our minds at Baskerville Hall.”

¹⁶⁷“But what do you intend to do?”

¹⁶⁸“I have no doubt, sir, that we shall succeed in establishing ourselves in some business. ¹⁶⁹Sir Charles’s generosity has given us the means to do so. ¹⁷⁰And now, sir, perhaps I had best show you to your rooms.”

¹⁷¹A square balustraded gallery ran round the top of the old hall, approached by a double stair. ¹⁷²From this central point two long corridors extended the whole length of the building, from which all the bedrooms opened. ¹⁷³My own was in the same wing as Baskerville’s and almost next door to it. ¹⁷⁴These rooms appeared to be much more modern than the central part of the house, and the bright paper and numerous candles did something to remove the sombre impression which our arrival had left upon my mind.

¹⁷⁵But the dining-room which opened out of the hall was a place of shadow and gloom. ¹⁷⁶It was a long chamber with a step separating the dais where the family sat from the lower portion reserved for their dependents. ¹⁷⁷At one end a minstrel’s gallery overlooked it. ¹⁷⁸Black beams shot across above our heads, with a smoke-darkened ceiling beyond them. ¹⁷⁹With rows of flaring torches to light it up, and the colour and rude hilarity of an old-time banquet, it might have softened; but now, when two black-clothed gentlemen sat in the little circle of light thrown by a shaded lamp, one’s voice became hushed and one’s spirit subdued. ¹⁸⁰A dim line of ancestors, in every variety of dress, from the Elizabethan knight to the buck of the Regency, stared down upon us and daunted us by their silent company. ¹⁸¹We

talked little, and I for one was glad when the meal was over and we were able to retire into the modern billiard-room and smoke a cigarette.

¹⁸²“My word, it isn't a very cheerful place,” said Sir Henry. ¹⁸³“I suppose one can tone down to it, but I feel a bit out of the picture at present. ¹⁸⁴I don't wonder that my uncle got a little jumpy if he lived all alone in such a house as this. ¹⁸⁵However, if it suits you, we will retire early to-night, and perhaps things may seem more cheerful in the morning.”

¹⁸⁶I drew aside my curtains before I went to bed and looked out from my window. ¹⁸⁷It opened upon the grassy space which lay in front of the hall door. ¹⁸⁸Beyond, two copses of trees moaned and swung in a rising wind. ¹⁸⁹A half moon broke through the rifts of racing clouds. ¹⁹⁰In its cold light I saw beyond the trees a broken fringe of rocks, and the long, low curve of the melancholy moor. ¹⁹¹I closed the curtain, feeling that my last impression was in keeping with the rest.

¹⁹²And yet it was not quite the last. ¹⁹³I found myself weary and yet wakeful, tossing restlessly from side to side, seeking for the sleep which would not come. ¹⁹⁴Far away a chiming clock struck out the quarters of the hours, but otherwise a deathly silence lay upon the old house. ¹⁹⁵And then suddenly, in the very dead of the night, there came a sound to my ears, clear, resonant, and unmistakable. ¹⁹⁶It was the sob of a woman, the muffled, strangling gasp of one who is torn by an uncontrollable sorrow. ¹⁹⁷I sat up in bed and listened intently. ¹⁹⁸The noise could not have been far away and was certainly in the house. ¹⁹⁹For half an hour I waited with every nerve on the alert, but there came no other sound save the chiming clock and the rustle of the ivy on the wall.

Chapter VII.

The Stapletons of Merripit House

¹The fresh beauty of the following morning did something to efface from our minds the grim and gray impression which had been left upon both of us by our first experience of Baskerville Hall. ²As Sir Henry and I sat at breakfast the sunlight flooded in through the high mullioned windows, throwing watery patches of colour from the coats of arms which covered them. ³The dark panelling glowed like bronze in the golden rays, and it was hard to realize that this was indeed the chamber which had struck such a gloom into our souls upon the evening before.

⁴"I guess it is ourselves and not the house that we have to blame!" said the baronet. ⁵"We were tired with our journey and chilled by our drive, so we took a gray view of the place. ⁶Now we are fresh and well, so it is all cheerful once more."

⁷"And yet it was not entirely a question of imagination," I answered. ⁸"Did you, for example, happen to hear someone, a woman I think, sobbing in the night?"

⁹"That is curious, for I did when I was half asleep fancy that I heard something of the sort. ¹⁰I waited quite a time, but there was no more of it, so I concluded that it was all a dream."

¹¹"I heard it distinctly, and I am sure that it was really the sob of a woman."

¹²"We must ask about this right away." ¹³He rang the bell and asked Barrymore whether he could account for our experience. ¹⁴It seemed to me that the pallid features of the butler turned a shade paler still as he listened to his master's question.

¹⁵"There are only two women in the house, Sir Henry," he answered. ¹⁶"One is the scullery-maid, who sleeps in the other wing. ¹⁷The other is my wife, and I can answer for it that the sound could not have come from her."

¹⁸And yet he lied as he said it, for it chanced that after breakfast I met Mrs. Barrymore in the long corridor with the sun full upon her face. ¹⁹She was a large, impassive, heavy-featured woman with a stern set expression of mouth. ²⁰But her tell-tale eyes were red and glanced at me from between swollen lids. ²¹It was she, then, who wept in the night, and if she did so her husband must know it. ²²Yet he had taken the obvious risk of discovery in declaring that it was not so. ²³Why had he done this? ²⁴And why did she weep so bitterly? ²⁵Already round this pale-faced, handsome, black-bearded man there was gathering an atmosphere of mystery and of gloom. ²⁶It was he who had been the first to discover the body of Sir Charles, and we had only his word for all the circumstances which led up to the old man's death. ²⁷Was it possible that it was Barrymore after all whom we had seen in the cab in Regent Street? ²⁸The beard might well have been the same. ²⁹The cabman had described a somewhat shorter man, but such an impression might easily have been erroneous. ³⁰How could I settle the point forever? ³¹Obviously the first thing to do was to see the Grimpen postmaster, and find whether the test telegram had really been placed in Barrymore's own hands. ³²Be the answer what it might, I should at least have something to report to Sherlock Holmes.

³³Sir Henry had numerous papers to examine after breakfast, so that the time was propitious for my excursion. ³⁴It was a pleasant walk of four miles along the edge of the moor, leading me at last to a small gray hamlet, in which two larger buildings, which proved to be the inn and the house of Dr. Mortimer, stood high above the rest. ³⁵The postmaster, who was also the village grocer, had a clear recollection of the telegram.

³⁶"Certainly, sir," said he, "I had the telegram delivered to Mr. Barrymore exactly as directed."

³⁷“Who delivered it?”

³⁸“My boy here. ³⁹James, you delivered that telegram to Mr. Barrymore at the Hall last week, did you not?”

⁴⁰“Yes, father, I delivered it.”

⁴¹“Into his own hands?” I asked.

⁴²“Well, he was up in the loft at the time, so that I could not put it into his own hands, but I gave it into Mrs. Barrymore's hands, and she promised to deliver it at once.”

⁴³“Did you see Mr. Barrymore?”

⁴⁴“No, sir; I tell you he was in the loft.”

⁴⁵“If you didn't see him, how do you know he was in the loft?”

⁴⁶“Well, surely his own wife ought to know where he is,” said the postmaster testily. ⁴⁷“Didn't he get the telegram? ⁴⁸If there is any mistake it is for Mr. Barrymore himself to complain.”

⁴⁹It seemed hopeless to pursue the inquiry any farther, but it was clear that in spite of Holmes's ruse we had no proof that Barrymore had not been in London all the time. ⁵⁰Suppose that it were so—suppose that the same man had been the last who had seen Sir Charles alive, and the first to dog the new heir when he returned to England. ⁵¹What then? ⁵²Was he the agent of others or had he some sinister design of his own? ⁵³What interest could he have in persecuting the Baskerville family? ⁵⁴I thought of the strange warning clipped out of the leading article of the Times. ⁵⁵Was that his work or was it possibly the doing of someone who was bent upon counteracting his schemes? ⁵⁶The only conceivable motive was that which had been suggested by Sir Henry, that if the family could be scared away a comfortable and permanent home would be secured for the Barrymores. ⁵⁷But surely such an explanation as that would be quite inadequate to account for the deep and subtle scheming which seemed to be weaving an invisible net round the young baronet. ⁵⁸Holmes himself had said that no more complex case had come to him in all the long series of his sensational investigations. ⁵⁹I prayed, as I walked back along the gray, lonely road, that my friend might soon be freed from his preoccupations and able to come down to take this heavy burden of responsibility from my shoulders.

⁶⁰Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of running feet behind me and by a voice which called me by name. ⁶¹I turned, expecting to see Dr. Mortimer, but to my surprise it was a stranger who was pursuing me. ⁶²He was a small, slim, clean-shaven, prim-faced man, flaxen-haired and lean-jawed, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a gray suit and wearing a straw hat. ⁶³A tin box for botanical specimens hung over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his hands.

⁶⁴“You will, I am sure, excuse my presumption, Dr. Watson,” said he, as he came panting up to where I stood. ⁶⁵“Here on the moor we are homely folk and do not wait for formal introductions. ⁶⁶You may possibly have heard my name from our mutual friend, Mortimer. ⁶⁷I am Stapleton, of Merripit House.”

⁶⁸“Your net and box would have told me as much,” said I, “for I knew that Mr. Stapleton was a naturalist. ⁶⁹But how did you know me?”

⁷⁰“I have been calling on Mortimer, and he pointed you out to me from the window of his surgery as you passed. ⁷¹As our road lay the same way I thought that I would overtake you and introduce myself. ⁷²I trust that Sir Henry is none the worse for his journey?”

⁷³“He is very well, thank you.”

⁷⁴“We were all rather afraid that after the sad death of Sir Charles the new baronet might refuse to live here. ⁷⁵It is asking much of a wealthy man to come down and bury himself in a place of this kind, but I

need not tell you that it means a very great deal to the country-side. ⁷⁶Sir Henry has, I suppose, no superstitious fears in the matter?"

⁷⁷"I do not think that it is likely."

⁷⁸"Of course you know the legend of the fiend dog which haunts the family?"

⁷⁹"I have heard it."

⁸⁰"It is extraordinary how credulous the peasants are about here! ⁸¹Any number of them are ready to swear that they have seen such a creature upon the moor." ⁸²He spoke with a smile, but I seemed to read in his eyes that he took the matter more seriously. ⁸³"The story took a great hold upon the imagination of Sir Charles, and I have no doubt that it led to his tragic end."

⁸⁴"But how?"

⁸⁵"His nerves were so worked up that the appearance of any dog might have had a fatal effect upon his diseased heart. ⁸⁶I fancy that he really did see something of the kind upon that last night in the Yew Alley. ⁸⁷I feared that some disaster might occur, for I was very fond of the old man, and I knew that his heart was weak."

⁸⁸"How did you know that?"

⁸⁹"My friend Mortimer told me."

⁹⁰"You think, then, that some dog pursued Sir Charles, and that he died of fright in consequence?"

⁹¹"Have you any better explanation?"

⁹²"I have not come to any conclusion."

⁹³"Has Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

⁹⁴The words took away my breath for an instant, but a glance at the placid face and steadfast eyes of my companion showed that no surprise was intended.

⁹⁵"It is useless for us to pretend that we do not know you, Dr. Watson," said he. ⁹⁶"The records of your detective have reached us here, and you could not celebrate him without being known yourself. ⁹⁷When Mortimer told me your name he could not deny your identity. ⁹⁸If you are here, then it follows that Mr. Sherlock Holmes is interesting himself in the matter, and I am naturally curious to know what view he may take."

⁹⁹"I am afraid that I cannot answer that question."

¹⁰⁰"May I ask if he is going to honour us with a visit himself?"

¹⁰¹"He cannot leave town at present. ¹⁰²He has other cases which engage his attention."

¹⁰³"What a pity! ¹⁰⁴He might throw some light on that which is so dark to us. ¹⁰⁵But as to your own researches, if there is any possible way in which I can be of service to you I trust that you will command me. ¹⁰⁶If I had any indication of the nature of your suspicions or how you propose to investigate the case, I might perhaps even now give you some aid or advice."

¹⁰⁷"I assure you that I am simply here upon a visit to my friend, Sir Henry, and that I need no help of any kind."

¹⁰⁸"Excellent!" said Stapleton. ¹⁰⁹"You are perfectly right to be wary and discreet. ¹¹⁰I am justly reproved for what I feel was an unjustifiable intrusion, and I promise you that I will not mention the matter again."

¹¹¹We had come to a point where a narrow grassy path struck off from the road and wound away across the moor. ¹¹²A steep, boulder-sprinkled hill lay upon the right which had in bygone days been cut into a granite quarry. ¹¹³The face which was turned towards us formed a dark cliff, with ferns and brambles growing in its niches. ¹¹⁴From over a distant rise there floated a gray plume of smoke.

¹¹⁵“A moderate walk along this moor-path brings us to Merripit House,” said he. ¹¹⁶“Perhaps you will spare an hour that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister.”

¹¹⁷My first thought was that I should be by Sir Henry's side. ¹¹⁸But then I remembered the pile of papers and bills with which his study table was littered. ¹¹⁹It was certain that I could not help with those. ¹²⁰And Holmes had expressly said that I should study the neighbours upon the moor. ¹²¹I accepted Stapleton's invitation, and we turned together down the path.

¹²²“It is a wonderful place, the moor,” said he, looking round over the undulating downs, long green rollers, with crests of jagged granite foaming up into fantastic surges. ¹²³“You never tire of the moor. ¹²⁴You cannot think the wonderful secrets which it contains. ¹²⁵It is so vast, and so barren, and so mysterious.”

¹²⁶“You know it well, then?”

¹²⁷“I have only been here two years. ¹²⁸The residents would call me a newcomer. ¹²⁹We came shortly after Sir Charles settled. ¹³⁰But my tastes led me to explore every part of the country round, and I should think that there are few men who know it better than I do.”

¹³¹“Is it hard to know?”

¹³²“Very hard. ¹³³You see, for example, this great plain to the north here with the queer hills breaking out of it. ¹³⁴Do you observe anything remarkable about that?”

¹³⁵“It would be a rare place for a gallop.”

¹³⁶“You would naturally think so and the thought has cost several their lives before now. ¹³⁷You notice those bright green spots scattered thickly over it?”

¹³⁸“Yes, they seem more fertile than the rest.”

¹³⁹Stapleton laughed.

¹⁴⁰“That is the great Grimpen Mire,” said he. ¹⁴¹“A false step yonder means death to man or beast. ¹⁴²Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. ¹⁴³He never came out. ¹⁴⁴I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last. ¹⁴⁵Even in dry seasons it is a danger to cross it, but after these autumn rains it is an awful place. ¹⁴⁶And yet I can find my way to the very heart of it and return alive. ¹⁴⁷By George, there is another of those miserable ponies!”

¹⁴⁸Something brown was rolling and tossing among the green sedges. ¹⁴⁹Then a long, agonized, writhing neck shot upward and a dreadful cry echoed over the moor. ¹⁵⁰It turned me cold with horror, but my companion's nerves seemed to be stronger than mine.

¹⁵¹“It's gone!” said he. ¹⁵²“The mire has him. ¹⁵³Two in two days, and many more, perhaps, for they get in the way of going there in the dry weather, and never know the difference until the mire has them in its clutches. ¹⁵⁴It's a bad place, the great Grimpen Mire.”

¹⁵⁵“And you say you can penetrate it?”

¹⁵⁶“Yes, there are one or two paths which a very active man can take. ¹⁵⁷I have found them out.”

¹⁵⁸“But why should you wish to go into so horrible a place?”

¹⁵⁹“Well, you see the hills beyond? ¹⁶⁰They are really islands cut off on all sides by the impassable mire, which has crawled round them in the course of years. ¹⁶¹That is where the rare plants and the butterflies are, if you have the wit to reach them.”

¹⁶²“I shall try my luck some day.”

¹⁶³He looked at me with a surprised face.

¹⁶⁴“For God's sake put such an idea out of your mind,” said he. ¹⁶⁵“Your blood would be upon my head. I assure you that there would not be the least chance of your coming back alive. ¹⁶⁶It is only by remembering certain complex landmarks that I am able to do it.”

¹⁶⁷“Halloa!” I cried. ¹⁶⁸“What is that?”

¹⁶⁹A long, low moan, indescribably sad, swept over the moor. ¹⁷⁰It filled the whole air, and yet it was impossible to say whence it came. ¹⁷¹From a dull murmur it swelled into a deep roar, and then sank back into a melancholy, throbbing murmur once again. ¹⁷²Stapleton looked at me with a curious expression in his face.

¹⁷³“Queer place, the moor!” said he.

¹⁷⁴“But what is it?”

¹⁷⁵“The peasants say it is the Hound of the Baskervilles calling for its prey. ¹⁷⁶I've heard it once or twice before, but never quite so loud.”

¹⁷⁷I looked round, with a chill of fear in my heart, at the huge swelling plain, mottled with the green patches of rushes. ¹⁷⁸Nothing stirred over the vast expanse save a pair of ravens, which croaked loudly from a tor behind us.

¹⁷⁹“You are an educated man. ¹⁸⁰You don't believe such nonsense as that?” said I. ¹⁸¹“What do you think is the cause of so strange a sound?”

¹⁸²“Bogs make queer noises sometimes. ¹⁸³It's the mud settling, or the water rising, or something.”

¹⁸⁴“No, no, that was a living voice.”

¹⁸⁵“Well, perhaps it was. ¹⁸⁶Did you ever hear a bittern booming?”

¹⁸⁷“No, I never did.”

¹⁸⁸“It's a very rare bird—practically extinct—in England now, but all things are possible upon the moor.

¹⁸⁹Yes, I should not be surprised to learn that what we have heard is the cry of the last of the bitterns.”

¹⁹⁰“It's the weirdest, strangest thing that ever I heard in my life.”

¹⁹¹“Yes, it's rather an uncanny place altogether. ¹⁹²Look at the hill-side yonder. ¹⁹³What do you make of those?”

¹⁹⁴The whole steep slope was covered with gray circular rings of stone, a score of them at least.

¹⁹⁵“What are they? ¹⁹⁶Sheep-pens?”

¹⁹⁷“No, they are the homes of our worthy ancestors. ¹⁹⁸Prehistoric man lived thickly on the moor, and as no one in particular has lived there since, we find all his little arrangements exactly as he left them.

¹⁹⁹These are his wigwams with the roofs off. ²⁰⁰You can even see his hearth and his couch if you have the curiosity to go inside.”

²⁰¹“But it is quite a town. ²⁰²When was it inhabited?”

²⁰³“Neolithic man—no date.”

²⁰⁴“What did he do?”

²⁰⁵“He grazed his cattle on these slopes, and he learned to dig for tin when the bronze sword began to supersede the stone axe. ²⁰⁶Look at the great trench in the opposite hill. ²⁰⁷That is his mark. ²⁰⁸Yes, you will find some very singular points about the moor, Dr. Watson. ²⁰⁹Oh, excuse me an instant! ²¹⁰It is surely Cyclopides.”

²¹¹A small fly or moth had fluttered across our path, and in an instant Stapleton was rushing with extraordinary energy and speed in pursuit of it. ²¹²To my dismay the creature flew straight for the great mire, and my acquaintance never paused for an instant, bounding from tuft to tuft behind it, his green net waving in the air. ²¹³His gray clothes and jerky, zigzag, irregular progress made him not unlike some huge moth himself. ²¹⁴I was standing watching his pursuit with a mixture of admiration for his extraordinary activity and fear lest he should lose his footing in the treacherous mire, when I heard the sound of steps, and turning round found a woman near me upon the path. ²¹⁵She had come from the direction in which the plume of smoke indicated the position of Merripit House, but the dip of the moor had hid her until she was quite close.

²¹⁶I could not doubt that this was the Miss Stapleton of whom I had been told, since ladies of any sort must be few upon the moor, and I remembered that I had heard someone describe her as being a beauty. ²¹⁷The woman who approached me was certainly that, and of a most uncommon type. ²¹⁸There could not have been a greater contrast between brother and sister, for Stapleton was neutral tinted, with light hair and gray eyes, while she was darker than any brunette whom I have seen in England—slim, elegant, and tall. ²¹⁹She had a proud, finely cut face, so regular that it might have seemed impassive were it not for the sensitive mouth and the beautiful dark, eager eyes. ²²⁰With her perfect figure and elegant dress she was, indeed, a strange apparition upon a lonely moorland path. ²²¹Her eyes were on her brother as I turned, and then she quickened her pace towards me. ²²²I had raised my hat and was about to make some explanatory remark, when her own words turned all my thoughts into a new channel.

²²³“Go back!” she said. ²²⁴“Go straight back to London, instantly.”

²²⁵I could only stare at her in stupid surprise. ²²⁶Her eyes blazed at me, and she tapped the ground impatiently with her foot.

²²⁷“Why should I go back?” I asked.

²²⁸“I cannot explain.” ²²⁹She spoke in a low, eager voice, with a curious lisp in her utterance. ²³⁰“But for God's sake do what I ask you. ²³¹Go back and never set foot upon the moor again.”

²³²“But I have only just come.”

²³³“Man, man!” she cried. ²³⁴“Can you not tell when a warning is for your own good? ²³⁵Go back to London! ²³⁶Start to-night! ²³⁷Get away from this place at all costs! ²³⁸Hush, my brother is coming! ²³⁹Not a word of what I have said. ²⁴⁰Would you mind getting that orchid for me among the mares-tails yonder? ²⁴¹We are very rich in orchids on the moor, though, of course, you are rather late to see the beauties of the place.”

²⁴²Stapleton had abandoned the chase and came back to us breathing hard and flushed with his exertions.

²⁴³“Halloa, Beryl!” said he, and it seemed to me that the tone of his greeting was not altogether a cordial one.

²⁴⁴“Well, Jack, you are very hot.”

²⁴⁵“Yes, I was chasing a Cyclopes. ²⁴⁶He is very rare and seldom found in the late autumn. ²⁴⁷What a pity that I should have missed him!” ²⁴⁸He spoke unconcernedly, but his small light eyes glanced incessantly from the girl to me.

²⁴⁹“You have introduced yourselves, I can see.”

²⁵⁰“Yes. ²⁵¹I was telling Sir Henry that it was rather late for him to see the true beauties of the moor.”

²⁵²“Why, who do you think this is?”

²⁵³“I imagine that it must be Sir Henry Baskerville.”

²⁵⁴“No, no,” said I. ²⁵⁵“Only a humble commoner, but his friend. ²⁵⁶My name is Dr. Watson.”

²⁵⁷A flush of vexation passed over her expressive face. ²⁵⁸“We have been talking at cross purposes,” said she.

²⁵⁹“Why, you had not very much time for talk,” her brother remarked with the same questioning eyes.

²⁶⁰“I talked as if Dr. Watson were a resident instead of being merely a visitor,” said she. ²⁶¹“It cannot much matter to him whether it is early or late for the orchids. ²⁶²But you will come on, will you not, and see Merripit House?”

²⁶³A short walk brought us to it, a bleak moorland house, once the farm of some grazier in the old prosperous days, but now put into repair and turned into a modern dwelling. ²⁶⁴An orchard surrounded it, but the trees, as is usual upon the moor, were stunted and nipped, and the effect of the whole place was mean and melancholy. ²⁶⁵We were admitted by a strange, wizened, rusty-coated old manservant, who seemed in keeping with the house. ²⁶⁶Inside, however, there were large rooms furnished with an elegance in which I seemed to recognize the taste of the lady. ²⁶⁷As I looked from their windows at the interminable granite-flecked moor rolling unbroken to the farthest horizon I could not but marvel at what could have brought this highly educated man and this beautiful woman to live in such a place.

²⁶⁸“Queer spot to choose, is it not?” said he as if in answer to my thought. ²⁶⁹“And yet we manage to make ourselves fairly happy, do we not, Beryl?”

²⁷⁰“Quite happy,” said she, but there was no ring of conviction in her words.

²⁷¹“I had a school,” said Stapleton. ²⁷²“It was in the north country. ²⁷³The work to a man of my temperament was mechanical and uninteresting, but the privilege of living with youth, of helping to mould those young minds, and of impressing them with one's own character and ideals, was very dear to me. ²⁷⁴However, the fates were against us. ²⁷⁵A serious epidemic broke out in the school and three of the boys died. ²⁷⁶It never recovered from the blow, and much of my capital was irretrievably swallowed up. ²⁷⁷And yet, if it were not for the loss of the charming companionship of the boys, I could rejoice over my own misfortune, for, with my strong tastes for botany and zoology, I find an unlimited field of work here, and my sister is as devoted to Nature as I am. ²⁷⁸All this, Dr. Watson, has been brought upon your head by your expression as you surveyed the moor out of our window.”

²⁷⁹“It certainly did cross my mind that it might be a little dull—less for you, perhaps, than for your sister.”

²⁸⁰“No, no, I am never dull,” said she, quickly.

²⁸¹“We have books, we have our studies, and we have interesting neighbours. ²⁸²Dr. Mortimer is a most learned man in his own line. ²⁸³Poor Sir Charles was also an admirable companion. ²⁸⁴We knew him well, and miss him more than I can tell. ²⁸⁵Do you think that I should intrude if I were to call this afternoon and make the acquaintance of Sir Henry?”

²⁸⁶“I am sure that he would be delighted.”

²⁸⁷“Then perhaps you would mention that I propose to do so. ²⁸⁸We may in our humble way do something to make things more easy for him until he becomes accustomed to his new surroundings.

²⁸⁹Will you come upstairs, Dr. Watson, and inspect my collection of Lepidoptera? ²⁹⁰I think it is the most complete one in the south-west of England. ²⁹¹By the time that you have looked through them lunch will be almost ready.”

²⁹²But I was eager to get back to my charge. ²⁹³The melancholy of the moor, the death of the unfortunate pony, the weird sound which had been associated with the grim legend of the Baskervilles, all these things tinged my thoughts with sadness. ²⁹⁴Then on the top of these more or less vague impressions there had come the definite and distinct warning of Miss Stapleton, delivered with such intense earnestness that I could not doubt that some grave and deep reason lay behind it. ²⁹⁵I resisted all pressure to stay for lunch, and I set off at once upon my return journey, taking the grass-grown path by which we had come.

²⁹⁶It seems, however, that there must have been some short cut for those who knew it, for before I had reached the road I was astounded to see Miss Stapleton sitting upon a rock by the side of the track.

²⁹⁷Her face was beautifully flushed with her exertions, and she held her hand to her side.

²⁹⁸“I have run all the way in order to cut you off, Dr. Watson,” said she. ²⁹⁹“I had not even time to put on my hat. ³⁰⁰I must not stop, or my brother may miss me. ³⁰¹I wanted to say to you how sorry I am about the stupid mistake I made in thinking that you were Sir Henry. ³⁰²Please forget the words I said, which have no application whatever to you.”

³⁰³“But I can't forget them, Miss Stapleton,” said I. ³⁰⁴“I am Sir Henry's friend, and his welfare is a very close concern of mine. ³⁰⁵Tell me why it was that you were so eager that Sir Henry should return to London.”

³⁰⁶“A woman's whim, Dr. Watson. ³⁰⁷When you know me better you will understand that I cannot always give reasons for what I say or do.”

³⁰⁸“No, no. ³⁰⁹I remember the thrill in your voice. ³¹⁰I remember the look in your eyes. ³¹¹Please, please, be frank with me, Miss Stapleton, for ever since I have been here I have been conscious of shadows all round me. ³¹²Life has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track. ³¹³Tell me then what it was that you meant, and I will promise to convey your warning to Sir Henry.”

³¹⁴An expression of irresolution passed for an instant over her face, but her eyes had hardened again when she answered me.

³¹⁵“You make too much of it, Dr. Watson,” said she. ³¹⁶“My brother and I were very much shocked by the death of Sir Charles. ³¹⁷We knew him very intimately, for his favourite walk was over the moor to our house. ³¹⁸He was deeply impressed with the curse which hung over the family, and when this tragedy came I naturally felt that there must be some grounds for the fears which he had expressed. ³¹⁹I was distressed therefore when another member of the family came down to live here, and I felt that he should be warned of the danger which he will run. ³²⁰That was all which I intended to convey.

³²¹“But what is the danger?”

³²²“You know the story of the hound?”

³²³“I do not believe in such nonsense.”

³²⁴“But I do. ³²⁵If you have any influence with Sir Henry, take him away from a place which has always been fatal to his family. ³²⁶The world is wide. ³²⁷Why should he wish to live at the place of danger?”

³²⁸“Because it is the place of danger. ³²⁹That is Sir Henry's nature. ³³⁰I fear that unless you can give me some more definite information than this it would be impossible to get him to move.”

³³¹“I cannot say anything definite, for I do not know anything definite.”

³³²“I would ask you one more question, Miss Stapleton. ³³³If you meant no more than this when you first spoke to me, why should you not wish your brother to overhear what you said? ³³⁴There is nothing to which he, or anyone else, could object.”

³³⁵“My brother is very anxious to have the Hall inhabited, for he thinks it is for the good of the poor folk upon the moor. ³³⁶He would be very angry if he knew that I have said anything which might induce Sir Henry to go away. ³³⁷But I have done my duty now and I will say no more. ³³⁸I must get back, or he will miss me and suspect that I have seen you. ³³⁹Good-bye!” ³⁴⁰She turned and had disappeared in a few minutes among the scattered boulders, while I, with my soul full of vague fears, pursued my way to Baskerville Hall.

Chapter VIII.

First Report of Dr. Watson

¹From this point onward I will follow the course of events by transcribing my own letters to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which lie before me on the table. ²One page is missing, but otherwise they are exactly as written and show my feelings and suspicions of the moment more accurately than my memory, clear as it is upon these tragic events, can possibly do.

³Baskerville Hall, October 13th.

⁴My dear Holmes:

⁵My previous letters and telegrams have kept you pretty well up to date as to all that has occurred in this most God-forsaken corner of the world. ⁶The longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm. ⁷When you are once out upon its bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but on the other hand you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people. ⁸On all sides of you as you walk are the houses of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which are supposed to have marked their temples. ⁹As you look at their gray stone huts against the scarred hill-sides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. ¹⁰The strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must always have been most unfruitful soil. ¹¹I am no antiquarian, but I could imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced to accept that which none other would occupy.

¹²All this, however, is foreign to the mission on which you sent me and will probably be very uninteresting to your severely practical mind. ¹³I can still remember your complete indifference as to whether the sun moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. ¹⁴Let me, therefore, return to the facts concerning Sir Henry Baskerville.

¹⁵If you have not had any report within the last few days it is because up to to-day there was nothing of importance to relate. ¹⁶Then a very surprising circumstance occurred, which I shall tell you in due course. ¹⁷But, first of all, I must keep you in touch with some of the other factors in the situation.

¹⁸One of these, concerning which I have said little, is the escaped convict upon the moor. ¹⁹There is strong reason now to believe that he has got right away, which is a considerable relief to the lonely householders of this district. ²⁰A fortnight has passed since his flight, during which he has not been seen and nothing has been heard of him. ²¹It is surely inconceivable that he could have held out upon the moor during all that time. ²²Of course, so far as his concealment goes there is no difficulty at all. ²³Any one of these stone huts would give him a hiding-place. ²⁴But there is nothing to eat unless he were to catch and slaughter one of the moor sheep. ²⁵We think, therefore, that he has gone, and the outlying farmers sleep the better in consequence.

²⁶We are four able-bodied men in this household, so that we could take good care of ourselves, but I confess that I have had uneasy moments when I have thought of the Stapletons. ²⁷They live miles from any help. ²⁸There are one maid, an old manservant, the sister, and the brother, the latter not a very strong man. ²⁹They would be helpless in the hands of a desperate fellow like this Notting Hill criminal, if he could once effect an entrance. ³⁰Both Sir Henry and I were concerned at their situation, and it was suggested that Perkins the groom should go over to sleep there, but Stapleton would not hear of it.

³¹The fact is that our friend, the baronet, begins to display a considerable interest in our fair neighbour. ³²It is not to be wondered at, for time hangs heavily in this lonely spot to an active man like him, and she is a very fascinating and beautiful woman. ³³There is something tropical and exotic about her which forms a singular contrast to her cool and unemotional brother. ³⁴Yet he also gives the idea of hidden fires. ³⁵He has certainly a very marked influence over her, for I have seen her continually glance at him as she talked as if seeking approbation for what she said. ³⁶I trust that he is kind to her. ³⁷There is a dry glitter in his eyes, and a firm set of his thin lips, which goes with a positive and possibly a harsh nature. ³⁸You would find him an interesting study.

³⁹He came over to call upon Baskerville on that first day, and the very next morning he took us both to show us the spot where the legend of the wicked Hugo is supposed to have had its origin. ⁴⁰It was an excursion of some miles across the moor to a place which is so dismal that it might have suggested the story. ⁴¹We found a short valley between rugged tors which led to an open, grassy space flecked over with the white cotton grass. ⁴²In the middle of it rose two great stones, worn and sharpened at the upper end, until they looked like the huge corroding fangs of some monstrous beast. ⁴³In every way it corresponded with the scene of the old tragedy. ⁴⁴Sir Henry was much interested and asked Stapleton more than once whether he did really believe in the possibility of the interference of the supernatural in the affairs of men. ⁴⁵He spoke lightly, but it was evident that he was very much in earnest. ⁴⁶Stapleton was guarded in his replies, but it was easy to see that he said less than he might, and that he would not express his whole opinion out of consideration for the feelings of the baronet. ⁴⁷He told us of similar cases, where families had suffered from some evil influence, and he left us with the impression that he shared the popular view upon the matter.

⁴⁸On our way back we stayed for lunch at Merripit House, and it was there that Sir Henry made the acquaintance of Miss Stapleton. ⁴⁹From the first moment that he saw her he appeared to be strongly attracted by her, and I am much mistaken if the feeling was not mutual. ⁵⁰He referred to her again and again on our walk home, and since then hardly a day has passed that we have not seen something of the brother and sister. ⁵¹They dine here to-night, and there is some talk of our going to them next week. ⁵²One would imagine that such a match would be very welcome to Stapleton, and yet I have more than once caught a look of the strongest disapprobation in his face when Sir Henry has been paying some attention to his sister. ⁵³He is much attached to her, no doubt, and would lead a lonely life without her, but it would seem the height of selfishness if he were to stand in the way of her making so brilliant a marriage. ⁵⁴Yet I am certain that he does not wish their intimacy to ripen into love, and I have several times observed that he has taken pains to prevent them from being tête-à-tête. ⁵⁵By the way, your instructions to me never to allow Sir Henry to go out alone will become very much more onerous if a love affair were to be added to our other difficulties. ⁵⁶My popularity would soon suffer if I were to carry out your orders to the letter.

⁵⁷The other day—Thursday, to be more exact—Dr. Mortimer lunched with us. ⁵⁸He has been excavating a barrow at Long Down, and has got a prehistoric skull which fills him with great joy. ⁵⁹Never was there such a single-minded enthusiast as he! ⁶⁰The Stapletons came in afterwards, and the good doctor took us all to the Yew Alley, at Sir Henry's request, to show us exactly how everything occurred upon that fatal night. ⁶¹It is a long, dismal walk, the Yew Alley, between two high walls of clipped hedge, with a narrow band of grass upon either side. ⁶²At the far end is an old tumble-down summer-house. ⁶³Half-way down is the moor-gate, where the old gentleman left his cigar-ash. ⁶⁴It is a white wooden gate with a latch. ⁶⁵Beyond it lies the wide moor. ⁶⁶I remembered your theory of the affair and tried to picture all that had occurred. ⁶⁷As the old man stood there he saw something coming across the moor, something which terrified him so that he lost his wits, and ran and ran until he died of sheer horror and exhaustion. ⁶⁸There was the long, gloomy tunnel down which he fled. ⁶⁹And from what? ⁷⁰A sheep-dog of the moor? ⁷¹Or a spectral hound, black, silent, and monstrous? ⁷²Was there a human agency in the matter? ⁷³Did the pale, watchful Barrymore know more than he cared to say? ⁷⁴It was all dim and vague, but always there is the dark shadow of crime behind it.

⁷⁵One other neighbour I have met since I wrote last. ⁷⁶This is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who lives some four miles to the south of us. ⁷⁷He is an elderly man, red-faced, white-haired, and choleric. ⁷⁸His passion is for the British law, and he has spent a large fortune in litigation. ⁷⁹He fights for the mere pleasure of fighting and is equally ready to take up either side of a question, so that it is no wonder that he has found it a costly amusement. ⁸⁰Sometimes he will shut up a right of way and defy the parish to make him open it. ⁸¹At others he will with his own hands tear down some other man's gate and declare that a path has existed there from time immemorial, defying the owner to prosecute him for trespass. ⁸²He is learned in old manorial and communal rights, and he applies his knowledge sometimes in favour of the villagers of Fernworthy and sometimes against them, so that he is periodically either carried in triumph down the village street or else burned in effigy, according to his latest exploit. ⁸³He is said to have about seven lawsuits upon his hands at present, which will probably swallow up the remainder of his fortune and so draw his sting and leave him harmless for the future. ⁸⁴Apart from the law he seems a kindly, good-natured person, and I only mention him because you were particular that I should send some description of the people who surround us. ⁸⁵He is curiously employed at present, for, being an amateur astronomer, he has an excellent telescope, with which he lies upon the roof of his own house and sweeps the moor all day in the hope of catching a glimpse of the escaped convict. ⁸⁶If he would confine his energies to this all would be well, but there are rumours that he intends to prosecute Dr. Mortimer for opening a grave without the consent of the next-of-kin, because he dug up the Neolithic skull in the barrow on Long Down. ⁸⁷He helps to keep our lives from being monotonous and gives a little comic relief where it is badly needed.

⁸⁸And now, having brought you up to date in the escaped convict, the Stapletons, Dr. Mortimer, and Frankland, of Lafter Hall, let me end on that which is most important and tell you more about the Barrymores, and especially about the surprising development of last night.

⁸⁹First of all about the test telegram, which you sent from London in order to make sure that Barrymore was really here. ⁹⁰I have already explained that the testimony of the postmaster shows that the test was worthless and that we have no proof one way or the other. ⁹¹I told Sir Henry how the matter stood, and he at once, in his downright fashion, had Barrymore up and asked him whether he had received the telegram himself. ⁹²Barrymore said that he had.

⁹³"Did the boy deliver it into your own hands?" asked Sir Henry.

⁹⁴Barrymore looked surprised, and considered for a little time.

⁹⁵"No," said he, "I was in the box-room at the time, and my wife brought it up to me."

⁹⁶"Did you answer it yourself?"

⁹⁷"No; I told my wife what to answer and she went down to write it."

⁹⁸In the evening he recurred to the subject of his own accord.

⁹⁹"I could not quite understand the object of your questions this morning, Sir Henry," said he. ¹⁰⁰"I trust that they do not mean that I have done anything to forfeit your confidence?"

¹⁰¹Sir Henry had to assure him that it was not so and pacify him by giving him a considerable part of his old wardrobe, the London outfit having now all arrived.

¹⁰²Mrs. Barrymore is of interest to me. ¹⁰³She is a heavy, solid person, very limited, intensely respectable, and inclined to be puritanical. ¹⁰⁴You could hardly conceive a less emotional subject. ¹⁰⁵Yet I have told you how, on the first night here, I heard her sobbing bitterly, and since then I have more than once observed traces of tears upon her face. ¹⁰⁶Some deep sorrow gnaws ever at her heart.

¹⁰⁷Sometimes I wonder if she has a guilty memory which haunts her, and sometimes I suspect

Barrymore of being a domestic tyrant. ¹⁰⁸I have always felt that there was something singular and questionable in this man's character, but the adventure of last night brings all my suspicions to a head.

¹⁰⁹And yet it may seem a small matter in itself. ¹¹⁰You are aware that I am not a very sound sleeper, and since I have been on guard in this house my slumbers have been lighter than ever. ¹¹¹Last night, about two in the morning, I was aroused by a stealthy step passing my room. ¹¹²I rose, opened my door, and peeped out. ¹¹³A long black shadow was trailing down the corridor. ¹¹⁴It was thrown by a man who walked softly down the passage with a candle held in his hand. ¹¹⁵He was in shirt and trousers, with no covering to his feet. ¹¹⁶I could merely see the outline, but his height told me that it was Barrymore. ¹¹⁷He walked very slowly and circumspectly, and there was something indescribably guilty and furtive in his whole appearance.

¹¹⁸I have told you that the corridor is broken by the balcony which runs round the hall, but that it is resumed upon the farther side. ¹¹⁹I waited until he had passed out of sight and then I followed him. ¹²⁰When I came round the balcony he had reached the end of the farther corridor, and I could see from the glimmer of light through an open door that he had entered one of the rooms. ¹²¹Now, all these rooms are unfurnished and unoccupied, so that his expedition became more mysterious than ever. ¹²²The light shone steadily as if he were standing motionless. ¹²³I crept down the passage as noiselessly as I could and peeped round the corner of the door.

¹²⁴Barrymore was crouching at the window with the candle held against the glass. ¹²⁵His profile was half turned towards me, and his face seemed to be rigid with expectation as he stared out into the blackness of the moor. ¹²⁶For some minutes he stood watching intently. ¹²⁷Then he gave a deep groan and with an impatient gesture he put out the light. ¹²⁸Instantly I made my way back to my room, and very shortly came the stealthy steps passing once more upon their return journey. ¹²⁹Long afterwards when I had fallen into a light sleep I heard a key turn somewhere in a lock, but I could not tell whence the sound came. ¹³⁰What it all means I cannot guess, but there is some secret business going on in this house of gloom which sooner or later we shall get to the bottom of. ¹³¹I do not trouble you with my theories, for you asked me to furnish you only with facts. ¹³²I have had a long talk with Sir Henry this morning, and we have made a plan of campaign founded upon my observations of last night. ¹³³I will not speak about it just now, but it should make my next report interesting reading.

Chapter IX.
(Second Report of Dr. Watson)
THE LIGHT UPON THE MOOR

¹Baskerville Hall, Oct. 15th.

²My dear Holmes:

³If I was compelled to leave you without much news during the early days of my mission you must acknowledge that I am making up for lost time, and that events are now crowding thick and fast upon us. ⁴In my last report I ended upon my top note with Barrymore at the window, and now I have quite a budget already which will, unless I am much mistaken, considerably surprise you. ⁵Things have taken a turn which I could not have anticipated. ⁶In some ways they have within the last forty-eight hours become much clearer and in some ways they have become more complicated. ⁷But I will tell you all and you shall judge for yourself.

⁸Before breakfast on the morning following my adventure I went down the corridor and examined the room in which Barrymore had been on the night before. ⁹The western window through which he had stared so intently has, I noticed, one peculiarity above all other windows in the house—it commands the nearest outlook on the moor. ¹⁰There is an opening between two trees which enables one from this point of view to look right down upon it, while from all the other windows it is only a distant glimpse which can be obtained. ¹¹It follows, therefore, that Barrymore, since only this window would serve the purpose, must have been looking out for something or somebody upon the moor. ¹²The night was very dark, so that I can hardly imagine how he could have hoped to see anyone. ¹³It had struck me that it was possible that some love intrigue was on foot. ¹⁴That would have accounted for his stealthy movements and also for the uneasiness of his wife. ¹⁵The man is a striking-looking fellow, very well equipped to steal the heart of a country girl, so that this theory seemed to have something to support it. ¹⁶That opening of the door which I had heard after I had returned to my room might mean that he had gone out to keep some clandestine appointment. ¹⁷So I reasoned with myself in the morning, and I tell you the direction of my suspicions, however much the result may have shown that they were unfounded.

¹⁸But whatever the true explanation of Barrymore's movements might be, I felt that the responsibility of keeping them to myself until I could explain them was more than I could bear. ¹⁹I had an interview with the baronet in his study after breakfast, and I told him all that I had seen. ²⁰He was less surprised than I had expected.

²¹"I knew that Barrymore walked about nights, and I had a mind to speak to him about it," said he.

²²"Two or three times I have heard his steps in the passage, coming and going, just about the hour you name."

²³"Perhaps then he pays a visit every night to that particular window," I suggested.

²⁴"Perhaps he does. ²⁵If so, we should be able to shadow him, and see what it is that he is after. ²⁶I wonder what your friend Holmes would do, if he were here."

²⁷"I believe that he would do exactly what you now suggest," said I. ²⁸"He would follow Barrymore and see what he did."

²⁹"Then we shall do it together."

³⁰"But surely he would hear us."

³¹“The man is rather deaf, and in any case we must take our chance of that. ³²We'll sit up in my room to-night and wait until he passes.” ³³Sir Henry rubbed his hands with pleasure, and it was evident that he hailed the adventure as a relief to his somewhat quiet life upon the moor.

³⁴The baronet has been in communication with the architect who prepared the plans for Sir Charles, and with a contractor from London, so that we may expect great changes to begin here soon. ³⁵There have been decorators and furnishers up from Plymouth, and it is evident that our friend has large ideas, and means to spare no pains or expense to restore the grandeur of his family. ³⁶When the house is renovated and refurnished, all that he will need will be a wife to make it complete. ³⁷Between ourselves there are pretty clear signs that this will not be wanting if the lady is willing, for I have seldom seen a man more infatuated with a woman than he is with our beautiful neighbour, Miss Stapleton. ³⁸And yet the course of true love does not run quite as smoothly as one would under the circumstances expect. ³⁹To-day, for example, its surface was broken by a very unexpected ripple, which has caused our friend considerable perplexity and annoyance.

⁴⁰After the conversation which I have quoted about Barrymore, Sir Henry put on his hat and prepared to go out. ⁴¹As a matter of course I did the same.

⁴²“What, are you coming, Watson?” he asked, looking at me in a curious way.

⁴³“That depends on whether you are going on the moor,” said I.

⁴⁴“Yes, I am.”

⁴⁵“Well, you know what my instructions are. ⁴⁶I am sorry to intrude, but you heard how earnestly Holmes insisted that I should not leave you, and especially that you should not go alone upon the moor.”

⁴⁷Sir Henry put his hand upon my shoulder with a pleasant smile.

⁴⁸“My dear fellow,” said he, “Holmes, with all his wisdom, did not foresee some things which have happened since I have been on the moor. ⁴⁹You understand me? ⁵⁰I am sure that you are the last man in the world who would wish to be a spoil-sport. ⁵¹I must go out alone.”

⁵²It put me in a most awkward position. ⁵³I was at a loss what to say or what to do, and before I had made up my mind he picked up his cane and was gone.

⁵⁴But when I came to think the matter over my conscience reproached me bitterly for having on any pretext allowed him to go out of my sight. ⁵⁵I imagined what my feelings would be if I had to return to you and to confess that some misfortune had occurred through my disregard for your instructions. ⁵⁶I assure you my cheeks flushed at the very thought. ⁵⁷It might not even now be too late to overtake him, so I set off at once in the direction of Merripit House.

⁵⁸I hurried along the road at the top of my speed without seeing anything of Sir Henry, until I came to the point where the moor path branches off. ⁵⁹There, fearing that perhaps I had come in the wrong direction after all, I mounted a hill from which I could command a view—the same hill which is cut into the dark quarry. ⁶⁰Thence I saw him at once. ⁶¹He was on the moor path, about a quarter of a mile off, and a lady was by his side who could only be Miss Stapleton. ⁶²It was clear that there was already an understanding between them and that they had met by appointment. ⁶³They were walking slowly along in deep conversation, and I saw her making quick little movements of her hands as if she were very earnest in what she was saying, while he listened intently, and once or twice shook his head in strong dissent. ⁶⁴I stood among the rocks watching them, very much puzzled as to what I should do next. ⁶⁵To follow them and break into their intimate conversation seemed to be an outrage, and yet my clear duty was never for an instant to let him out of my sight. ⁶⁶To act the spy upon a friend was a hateful task. ⁶⁷Still, I could see no better course than to observe him from the hill, and to clear my conscience by confessing to him afterwards what I had done. ⁶⁸It is true that if any sudden danger had

threatened him I was too far away to be of use, and yet I am sure that you will agree with me that the position was very difficult, and that there was nothing more which I could do.

⁶⁹Our friend, Sir Henry, and the lady had halted on the path and were standing deeply absorbed in their conversation, when I was suddenly aware that I was not the only witness of their interview. ⁷⁰A wisp of green floating in the air caught my eye, and another glance showed me that it was carried on a stick by a man who was moving among the broken ground. ⁷¹It was Stapleton with his butterfly-net. ⁷²He was very much closer to the pair than I was, and he appeared to be moving in their direction. ⁷³At this instant Sir Henry suddenly drew Miss Stapleton to his side. ⁷⁴His arm was round her, but it seemed to me that she was straining away from him with her face averted. ⁷⁵He stooped his head to hers, and she raised one hand as if in protest. ⁷⁶Next moment I saw them spring apart and turn hurriedly round. ⁷⁷Stapleton was the cause of the interruption. ⁷⁸He was running wildly towards them, his absurd net dangling behind him. ⁷⁹He gesticulated and almost danced with excitement in front of the lovers. ⁸⁰What the scene meant I could not imagine, but it seemed to me that Stapleton was abusing Sir Henry, who offered explanations, which became more angry as the other refused to accept them. ⁸¹The lady stood by in haughty silence. ⁸²Finally Stapleton turned upon his heel and beckoned in a peremptory way to his sister, who, after an irresolute glance at Sir Henry, walked off by the side of her brother. ⁸³The naturalist's angry gestures showed that the lady was included in his displeasure. ⁸⁴The baronet stood for a minute looking after them, and then he walked slowly back the way that he had come, his head hanging, the very picture of dejection.

⁸⁵What all this meant I could not imagine, but I was deeply ashamed to have witnessed so intimate a scene without my friend's knowledge. ⁸⁶I ran down the hill therefore and met the baronet at the bottom. ⁸⁷His face was flushed with anger and his brows were wrinkled, like one who is at his wit's ends what to do.

⁸⁸"Halloa, Watson! ⁸⁹Where have you dropped from?" said he. ⁹⁰"You don't mean to say that you came after me in spite of all?"

⁹¹I explained everything to him: how I had found it impossible to remain behind, how I had followed him, and how I had witnessed all that had occurred. ⁹²For an instant his eyes blazed at me, but my frankness disarmed his anger, and he broke at last into a rather rueful laugh.

⁹³"You would have thought the middle of that prairie a fairly safe place for a man to be private," said he, "but, by thunder, the whole country-side seems to have been out to see me do my wooing—and a mighty poor wooing at that! ⁹⁴Where had you engaged a seat?"

⁹⁵"I was on that hill."

⁹⁶"Quite in the back row, eh? ⁹⁷But her brother was well up to the front. ⁹⁸Did you see him come out on us?"

⁹⁹"Yes, I did."

¹⁰⁰"Did he ever strike you as being crazy—this brother of hers?"

¹⁰¹"I can't say that he ever did."

¹⁰²"I dare say not. ¹⁰³I always thought him sane enough until to-day, but you can take it from me that either he or I ought to be in a strait-jacket. ¹⁰⁴What's the matter with me, anyhow? ¹⁰⁵You've lived near me for some weeks, Watson. ¹⁰⁶Tell me straight, now! ¹⁰⁷Is there anything that would prevent me from making a good husband to a woman that I loved?"

¹⁰⁸"I should say not."

¹⁰⁹“He can't object to my worldly position, so it must be myself that he has this down on. ¹¹⁰What has he against me? ¹¹¹I never hurt man or woman in my life that I know of. ¹¹²And yet he would not so much as let me touch the tips of her fingers.”

¹¹³“Did he say so?”

¹¹⁴“That, and a deal more. ¹¹⁵I tell you, Watson, I've only known her these few weeks, but from the first I just felt that she was made for me, and she, too—she was happy when she was with me, and that I'll swear. ¹¹⁶There's a light in a woman's eyes that speaks louder than words. ¹¹⁷But he has never let us get together, and it was only to-day for the first time that I saw a chance of having a few words with her alone. ¹¹⁸She was glad to meet me, but when she did it was not love that she would talk about, and she wouldn't have let me talk about it either if she could have stopped it. ¹¹⁹She kept coming back to it that this was a place of danger, and that she would never be happy until I had left it. ¹²⁰I told her that since I had seen her I was in no hurry to leave it, and that if she really wanted me to go, the only way to work it was for her to arrange to go with me. ¹²¹With that I offered in as many words to marry her, but before she could answer, down came this brother of hers, running at us with a face on him like a madman. ¹²²He was just white with rage, and those light eyes of his were blazing with fury. ¹²³What was I doing with the lady? ¹²⁴How dared I offer her attentions which were distasteful to her? ¹²⁵Did I think that because I was a baronet I could do what I liked? ¹²⁶If he had not been her brother I should have known better how to answer him. ¹²⁷As it was I told him that my feelings towards his sister were such as I was not ashamed of, and that I hoped that she might honour me by becoming my wife. ¹²⁸That seemed to make the matter no better, so then I lost my temper too, and I answered him rather more hotly than I should perhaps, considering that she was standing by. ¹²⁹So it ended by his going off with her, as you saw, and here am I as badly puzzled a man as any in this county. ¹³⁰Just tell me what it all means, Watson, and I'll owe you more than ever I can hope to pay.”

¹³¹I tried one or two explanations, but, indeed, I was completely puzzled myself. ¹³²Our friend's title, his fortune, his age, his character, and his appearance are all in his favour, and I know nothing against him unless it be this dark fate which runs in his family. ¹³³That his advances should be rejected so brusquely without any reference to the lady's own wishes, and that the lady should accept the situation without protest, is very amazing. ¹³⁴However, our conjectures were set at rest by a visit from Stapleton himself that very afternoon. ¹³⁵He had come to offer apologies for his rudeness of the morning, and after a long private interview with Sir Henry in his study, the upshot of their conversation was that the breach is quite healed, and that we are to dine at Merripit House next Friday as a sign of it.

¹³⁶“I don't say now that he isn't a crazy man,” said Sir Henry; “I can't forget the look in his eyes when he ran at me this morning, but I must allow that no man could make a more handsome apology than he has done.”

¹³⁷“Did he give any explanation of his conduct?”

¹³⁸“His sister is everything in his life, he says. ¹³⁹That is natural enough, and I am glad that he should understand her value. ¹⁴⁰They have always been together, and according to his account he has been a very lonely man with only her as a companion, so that the thought of losing her was really terrible to him. ¹⁴¹He had not understood, he said, that I was becoming attached to her, but when he saw with his own eyes that it was really so, and that she might be taken away from him, it gave him such a shock that for a time he was not responsible for what he said or did. ¹⁴²He was very sorry for all that had passed, and he recognized how foolish and how selfish it was that he should imagine that he could hold a beautiful woman like his sister to himself for her whole life. ¹⁴³If she had to leave him he had rather it was to a neighbour like myself than to anyone else. ¹⁴⁴But in any case it was a blow to him, and it would take him some time before he could prepare himself to meet it. ¹⁴⁵He would withdraw all opposition upon his part if I would promise for three months to let the matter rest and to be content with

cultivating the lady's friendship during that time without claiming her love. ¹⁴⁶This I promised, and so the matter rests."

¹⁴⁷So there is one of our small mysteries cleared up. ¹⁴⁸It is something to have touched bottom anywhere in this bog in which we are floundering. ¹⁴⁹We know now why Stapleton looked with disfavour upon his sister's suitor—even when that suitor was so eligible a one as Sir Henry. ¹⁵⁰And now I pass on to another thread which I have extricated out of the tangled skein, the mystery of the sobs in the night, of the tear-stained face of Mrs. Barrymore, of the secret journey of the butler to the western lattice window. ¹⁵¹Congratulate me, my dear Holmes, and tell me that I have not disappointed you as an agent—that you do not regret the confidence which you showed in me when you sent me down. ¹⁵²All these things have by one night's work been thoroughly cleared.

¹⁵³I have said "by one night's work," but, in truth, it was by two nights' work, for on the first we drew entirely blank. ¹⁵⁴I sat up with Sir Henry in his rooms until nearly three o'clock in the morning, but no sound of any sort did we hear except the chiming clock upon the stairs. ¹⁵⁵It was a most melancholy vigil, and ended by each of us falling asleep in our chairs. ¹⁵⁶Fortunately we were not discouraged, and we determined to try again. ¹⁵⁷The next night we lowered the lamp, and sat smoking cigarettes without making the least sound. ¹⁵⁸It was incredible how slowly the hours crawled by, and yet we were helped through it by the same sort of patient interest which the hunter must feel as he watches the trap into which he hopes the game may wander. ¹⁵⁹One struck, and two, and we had almost for the second time given it up in despair, when in an instant we both sat bolt upright in our chairs, with all our weary senses keenly on the alert once more. ¹⁶⁰We had heard the creak of a step in the passage.

¹⁶¹Very stealthily we heard it pass along until it died away in the distance. ¹⁶²Then the baronet gently opened his door and we set out in pursuit. ¹⁶³Already our man had gone round the gallery, and the corridor was all in darkness. ¹⁶⁴Softly we stole along until we had come into the other wing. ¹⁶⁵We were just in time to catch a glimpse of the tall, black-bearded figure, his shoulders rounded, as he tip-toed down the passage. ¹⁶⁶Then he passed through the same door as before, and the light of the candle framed it in the darkness and shot one single yellow beam across the gloom of the corridor. ¹⁶⁷We shuffled cautiously towards it, trying every plank before we dared to put our whole weight upon it. ¹⁶⁸We had taken the precaution of leaving our boots behind us, but, even so, the old boards snapped and creaked beneath our tread. ¹⁶⁹Sometimes it seemed impossible that he should fail to hear our approach. ¹⁷⁰However, the man is fortunately rather deaf, and he was entirely preoccupied in that which he was doing. ¹⁷¹When at last we reached the door and peeped through we found him crouching at the window, candle in hand, his white, intent face pressed against the pane, exactly as I had seen him two nights before.

¹⁷²We had arranged no plan of campaign, but the baronet is a man to whom the most direct way is always the most natural. ¹⁷³He walked into the room, and as he did so Barrymore sprang up from the window with a sharp hiss of his breath and stood, livid and trembling, before us. ¹⁷⁴His dark eyes, glaring out of the white mask of his face, were full of horror and astonishment as he gazed from Sir Henry to me.

¹⁷⁵"What are you doing here, Barrymore?"

¹⁷⁶"Nothing, sir." ¹⁷⁷His agitation was so great that he could hardly speak, and the shadows sprang up and down from the shaking of his candle. ¹⁷⁸"It was the window, sir. ¹⁷⁹I go round at night to see that they are fastened."

¹⁸⁰"On the second floor?"

¹⁸¹"Yes, sir, all the windows."

¹⁸²“Look here, Barrymore,” said Sir Henry, sternly; “we have made up our minds to have the truth out of you, so it will save you trouble to tell it sooner rather than later. ¹⁸³Come, now! ¹⁸⁴No lies! ¹⁸⁵What were you doing at that window?”

¹⁸⁶The fellow looked at us in a helpless way, and he wrung his hands together like one who is in the last extremity of doubt and misery.

¹⁸⁷“I was doing no harm, sir. ¹⁸⁸I was holding a candle to the window.”

¹⁸⁹“And why were you holding a candle to the window?”

¹⁹⁰“Don't ask me, Sir Henry—don't ask me! ¹⁹¹I give you my word, sir, that it is not my secret, and that I cannot tell it. ¹⁹²If it concerned no one but myself I would not try to keep it from you.”

¹⁹³A sudden idea occurred to me, and I took the candle from the trembling hand of the butler.

¹⁹⁴“He must have been holding it as a signal,” said I. ¹⁹⁵“Let us see if there is any answer.” ¹⁹⁶I held it as he had done, and stared out into the darkness of the night. ¹⁹⁷Vaguely I could discern the black bank of the trees and the lighter expanse of the moor, for the moon was behind the clouds. ¹⁹⁸And then I gave a cry of exultation, for a tiny pin-point of yellow light had suddenly transfixed the dark veil, and glowed steadily in the centre of the black square framed by the window.

¹⁹⁹“There it is!” I cried.

²⁰⁰“No, no, sir, it is nothing—nothing at all!” the butler broke in; “I assure you, sir—”

²⁰¹“Move your light across the window, Watson!” cried the baronet. ²⁰²“See, the other moves also! ²⁰³Now, you rascal, do you deny that it is a signal? ²⁰⁴Come, speak up! ²⁰⁵Who is your confederate out yonder, and what is this conspiracy that is going on?”

²⁰⁶The man's face became openly defiant.

²⁰⁷“It is my business, and not yours. ²⁰⁸I will not tell.”

²⁰⁹“Then you leave my employment right away.”

²¹⁰“Very good, sir. ²¹¹If I must I must.”

²¹²“And you go in disgrace. ²¹³By thunder, you may well be ashamed of yourself. ²¹⁴Your family has lived with mine for over a hundred years under this roof, and here I find you deep in some dark plot against me.”

²¹⁵“No, no, sir; no, not against you!” ²¹⁶It was a woman's voice, and Mrs. Barrymore, paler and more horror-struck than her husband, was standing at the door. ²¹⁷Her bulky figure in a shawl and skirt might have been comic were it not for the intensity of feeling upon her face.

²¹⁸“We have to go, Eliza. ²¹⁹This is the end of it. ²²⁰You can pack our things,” said the butler.

²²¹“Oh, John, John, have I brought you to this? ²²²It is my doing, Sir Henry—all mine. ²²³He has done nothing except for my sake and because I asked him.”

²²⁴“Speak out, then! ²²⁵What does it mean?”

²²⁶“My unhappy brother is starving on the moor. ²²⁷We cannot let him perish at our very gates. ²²⁸The light is a signal to him that food is ready for him, and his light out yonder is to show the spot to which to bring it.”

²²⁹“Then your brother is—”

²³⁰“The escaped convict, sir— ²³¹Selden, the criminal.”

²³²“That's the truth, sir,” said Barrymore. ²³³“I said that it was not my secret and that I could not tell it to you. ²³⁴But now you have heard it, and you will see that if there was a plot it was not against you.”

²³⁵This, then, was the explanation of the stealthy expeditions at night and the light at the window. ²³⁶Sir Henry and I both stared at the woman in amazement. ²³⁷Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?

²³⁸“Yes, sir, my name was Selden, and he is my younger brother. ²³⁹We humoured him too much when he was a lad, and gave him his own way in everything until he came to think that the world was made for his pleasure, and that he could do what he liked in it. ²⁴⁰Then as he grew older he met wicked companions, and the devil entered into him until he broke my mother's heart and dragged our name in the dirt. ²⁴¹From crime to crime he sank lower and lower, until it is only the mercy of God which has snatched him from the scaffold; but to me, sir, he was always the little curly-headed boy that I had nursed and played with, as an elder sister would. ²⁴²That was why he broke prison, sir. ²⁴³He knew that I was here and that we could not refuse to help him. ²⁴⁴When he dragged himself here one night, weary and starving, with the warders hard at his heels, what could we do? ²⁴⁵We took him in and fed him and cared for him. ²⁴⁶Then you returned, sir, and my brother thought he would be safer on the moor than anywhere else until the hue and cry was over, so he lay in hiding there. ²⁴⁷But every second night we made sure if he was still there by putting a light in the window, and if there was an answer my husband took out some bread and meat to him. ²⁴⁸Every day we hoped that he was gone, but as long as he was there we could not desert him. ²⁴⁹That is the whole truth, as I am an honest Christian woman, and you will see that if there is blame in the matter it does not lie with my husband, but with me, for whose sake he has done all that he has.”

²⁵⁰The woman's words came with an intense earnestness which carried conviction with them.

²⁵¹“Is this true, Barrymore?”

²⁵²“Yes, Sir Henry. ²⁵³Every word of it.”

²⁵⁴“Well, I cannot blame you for standing by your own wife. ²⁵⁵Forget what I have said. ²⁵⁶Go to your room, you two, and we shall talk further about this matter in the morning.”

²⁵⁷When they were gone we looked out of the window again. ²⁵⁸Sir Henry had flung it open, and the cold night wind beat in upon our faces. ²⁵⁹Far away in the black distance there still glowed that one tiny point of yellow light.

²⁶⁰“I wonder he dares,” said Sir Henry.

²⁶¹“It may be so placed as to be only visible from here.”

²⁶²“Very likely. ²⁶³How far do you think it is?”

²⁶⁴“Out by the Cleft Tor, I think.”

²⁶⁵“Not more than a mile or two off.”

²⁶⁶“Hardly that.”

²⁶⁷“Well, it cannot be far if Barrymore had to carry out the food to it. ²⁶⁸And he is waiting, this villain, beside that candle. ²⁶⁹By thunder, Watson, I am going out to take that man!”

²⁷⁰The same thought had crossed my own mind. ²⁷¹It was not as if the Barrymores had taken us into their confidence. ²⁷²Their secret had been forced from them. ²⁷³The man was a danger to the community, an unmitigated scoundrel for whom there was neither pity nor excuse. ²⁷⁴We were only doing our duty

in taking this chance of putting him back where he could do no harm. ²⁷⁵With his brutal and violent nature, others would have to pay the price if we held our hands. ²⁷⁶Any night, for example, our neighbours the Stapletons might be attacked by him, and it may have been the thought of this which made Sir Henry so keen upon the adventure.

²⁷⁷"I will come," said I.

²⁷⁸"Then get your revolver and put on your boots. ²⁷⁹The sooner we start the better, as the fellow may put out his light and be off."

²⁸⁰In five minutes we were outside the door, starting upon our expedition. ²⁸¹We hurried through the dark shrubbery, amid the dull moaning of the autumn wind and the rustle of the falling leaves. ²⁸²The night air was heavy with the smell of damp and decay. ²⁸³Now and again the moon peeped out for an instant, but clouds were driving over the face of the sky, and just as we came out on the moor a thin rain began to fall. ²⁸⁴The light still burned steadily in front.

²⁸⁵"Are you armed?" I asked.

²⁸⁶"I have a hunting-crop."

²⁸⁷"We must close in on him rapidly, for he is said to be a desperate fellow. ²⁸⁸We shall take him by surprise and have him at our mercy before he can resist."

²⁸⁹"I say, Watson," said the baronet, "what would Holmes say to this? ²⁹⁰How about that hour of darkness in which the power of evil is exalted?"

²⁹¹As if in answer to his words there rose suddenly out of the vast gloom of the moor that strange cry which I had already heard upon the borders of the great Grimpen Mire. ²⁹²It came with the wind through the silence of the night, a long, deep mutter, then a rising howl, and then the sad moan in which it died away. ²⁹³Again and again it sounded, the whole air throbbing with it, strident, wild, and menacing. ²⁹⁴The baronet caught my sleeve and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

²⁹⁵"My God, what's that, Watson?"

²⁹⁶"I don't know. ²⁹⁷It's a sound they have on the moor. ²⁹⁸I heard it once before."

²⁹⁹It died away, and an absolute silence closed in upon us. ³⁰⁰We stood straining our ears, but nothing came.

³⁰¹"Watson," said the baronet, "it was the cry of a hound."

³⁰²My blood ran cold in my veins, for there was a break in his voice which told of the sudden horror which had seized him.

³⁰³"What do they call this sound?" he asked.

³⁰⁴"Who?"

³⁰⁵"The folk on the country-side."

³⁰⁶"Oh, they are ignorant people. ³⁰⁷Why should you mind what they call it?"

³⁰⁸"Tell me, Watson. ³⁰⁹What do they say of it?"

³¹⁰I hesitated but could not escape the question.

³¹¹"They say it is the cry of the Hound of the Baskervilles."

³¹²He groaned and was silent for a few moments.

³¹³“A hound it was,” he said, at last, “but it seemed to come from miles away, over yonder, I think.”

³¹⁴“It was hard to say whence it came.”

³¹⁵“It rose and fell with the wind. ³¹⁶Isn't that the direction of the great Grimpen Mire?”

³¹⁷“Yes, it is.”

³¹⁸“Well, it was up there. ³¹⁹Come now, Watson, didn't you think yourself that it was the cry of a hound?

³²⁰I am not a child. ³²¹You need not fear to speak the truth.”

³²²“Stapleton was with me when I heard it last. ³²³He said that it might be the calling of a strange bird.”

³²⁴“No, no, it was a hound. ³²⁵My God, can there be some truth in all these stories? ³²⁶Is it possible that I am really in danger from so dark a cause? ³²⁷You don't believe it, do you, Watson?”

³²⁸“No, no.”

³²⁹“And yet it was one thing to laugh about it in London, and it is another to stand out here in the darkness of the moor and to hear such a cry as that. ³³⁰And my uncle! ³³¹There was the footprint of the hound beside him as he lay. ³³²It all fits together. ³³³I don't think that I am a coward, Watson, but that sound seemed to freeze my very blood. ³³⁴Feel my hand!”

³³⁵It was as cold as a block of marble.

³³⁶“You'll be all right to-morrow.”

³³⁷“I don't think I'll get that cry out of my head. ³³⁸What do you advise that we do now?”

³³⁹“Shall we turn back?”

³⁴⁰“No, by thunder; we have come out to get our man, and we will do it. ³⁴¹We after the convict, and a hell-hound, as likely as not, after us. ³⁴²Come on! ³⁴³We'll see it through if all the fiends of the pit were loose upon the moor.”

³⁴⁴We stumbled slowly along in the darkness, with the black loom of the craggy hills around us, and the yellow speck of light burning steadily in front. ³⁴⁵There is nothing so deceptive as the distance of a light upon a pitch-dark night, and sometimes the glimmer seemed to be far away upon the horizon and sometimes it might have been within a few yards of us. ³⁴⁶But at last we could see whence it came, and then we knew that we were indeed very close. ³⁴⁷A guttering candle was stuck in a crevice of the rocks which flanked it on each side so as to keep the wind from it and also to prevent it from being visible, save in the direction of Baskerville Hall. ³⁴⁸A boulder of granite concealed our approach, and crouching behind it we gazed over it at the signal light. ³⁴⁹It was strange to see this single candle burning there in the middle of the moor, with no sign of life near it—just the one straight yellow flame and the gleam of the rock on each side of it.

³⁵⁰“What shall we do now?” whispered Sir Henry.

³⁵¹“Wait here. ³⁵²He must be near his light. ³⁵³Let us see if we can get a glimpse of him.”

³⁵⁴The words were hardly out of my mouth when we both saw him. ³⁵⁵Over the rocks, in the crevice of which the candle burned, there was thrust out an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. ³⁵⁶Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hillsides. ³⁵⁷The light beneath him was reflected in his small, cunning eyes which peered fiercely to right and left through the darkness, like a crafty and savage animal who has heard the steps of the hunters.

³⁵⁸Something had evidently aroused his suspicions. ³⁵⁹It may have been that Barrymore had some private signal which we had neglected to give, or the fellow may have had some other reason for thinking that all was not well, but I could read his fears upon his wicked face. ³⁶⁰Any instant he might dash out the light and vanish in the darkness. ³⁶¹I sprang forward therefore, and Sir Henry did the same. ³⁶²At the same moment the convict screamed out a curse at us and hurled a rock which splintered up against the boulder which had sheltered us. ³⁶³I caught one glimpse of his short, squat, strongly-built figure as he sprang to his feet and turned to run. ³⁶⁴At the same moment by a lucky chance the moon broke through the clouds. ³⁶⁵We rushed over the brow of the hill, and there was our man running with great speed down the other side, springing over the stones in his way with the activity of a mountain goat. ³⁶⁶A lucky long shot of my revolver might have crippled him, but I had brought it only to defend myself if attacked, and not to shoot an unarmed man who was running away.

³⁶⁷We were both swift runners and in fairly good training, but we soon found that we had no chance of overtaking him. ³⁶⁸We saw him for a long time in the moonlight until he was only a small speck moving swiftly among the boulders upon the side of a distant hill. ³⁶⁹We ran and ran until we were completely blown, but the space between us grew ever wider. ³⁷⁰Finally we stopped and sat panting on two rocks, while we watched him disappearing in the distance.

³⁷¹And it was at this moment that there occurred a most strange and unexpected thing. ³⁷²We had risen from our rocks and were turning to go home, having abandoned the hopeless chase. ³⁷³The moon was low upon the right, and the jagged pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. ³⁷⁴There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining back-ground, I saw the figure of a man upon the tor. ³⁷⁵Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes. ³⁷⁶I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. ³⁷⁷As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. ³⁷⁸He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay before him. ³⁷⁹He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. ³⁸⁰It was not the convict. ³⁸¹This man was far from the place where the latter had disappeared. ³⁸²Besides, he was a much taller man. ³⁸³With a cry of surprise I pointed him out to the baronet, but in the instant during which I had turned to grasp his arm the man was gone. ³⁸⁴There was the sharp pinnacle of granite still cutting the lower edge of the moon, but its peak bore no trace of that silent and motionless figure.

³⁸⁵I wished to go in that direction and to search the tor, but it was some distance away. ³⁸⁶The baronet's nerves were still quivering from that cry, which recalled the dark story of his family, and he was not in the mood for fresh adventures. ³⁸⁷He had not seen this lonely man upon the tor and could not feel the thrill which his strange presence and his commanding attitude had given to me. ³⁸⁸"A warder, no doubt," said he. ³⁸⁹"The moor has been thick with them since this fellow escaped." ³⁹⁰Well, perhaps his explanation may be the right one, but I should like to have some further proof of it. ³⁹¹To-day we mean to communicate to the Princetown people where they should look for their missing man, but it is hard lines that we have not actually had the triumph of bringing him back as our own prisoner. ³⁹²Such are the adventures of last night, and you must acknowledge, my dear Holmes, that I have done you very well in the matter of a report. ³⁹³Much of what I tell you is no doubt quite irrelevant, but still I feel that it is best that I should let you have all the facts and leave you to select for yourself those which will be of most service to you in helping you to your conclusions. ³⁹⁴We are certainly making some progress. ³⁹⁵So far as the Barrymores go we have found the motive of their actions, and that has cleared up the situation very much. ³⁹⁶But the moor with its mysteries and its strange inhabitants remains as inscrutable as ever. ³⁹⁷Perhaps in my next I may be able to throw some light upon this also. ³⁹⁸Best of all would it be if you could come down to us. ³⁹⁹In any case you will hear from me again in the course of the next few days.

Chapter X.

Extract from the Diary of Dr. Watson

¹So far I have been able to quote from the reports which I have forwarded during these early days to Sherlock Holmes. ²Now, however, I have arrived at a point in my narrative where I am compelled to abandon this method and to trust once more to my recollections, aided by the diary which I kept at the time. ³A few extracts from the latter will carry me on to those scenes which are indelibly fixed in every detail upon my memory. ⁴I proceed, then, from the morning which followed our abortive chase of the convict and our other strange experiences upon the moor.

⁵October 16th.— ⁶A dull and foggy day with a drizzle of rain. ⁷The house is banked in with rolling clouds, which rise now and then to show the dreary curves of the moor, with thin, silver veins upon the sides of the hills, and the distant boulders gleaming where the light strikes upon their wet faces. ⁸It is melancholy outside and in. ⁹The baronet is in a black reaction after the excitements of the night. ¹⁰I am conscious myself of a weight at my heart and a feeling of impending danger—ever present danger, which is the more terrible because I am unable to define it.

¹¹And have I not cause for such a feeling? ¹²Consider the long sequence of incidents which have all pointed to some sinister influence which is at work around us. ¹³There is the death of the last occupant of the Hall, fulfilling so exactly the conditions of the family legend, and there are the repeated reports from peasants of the appearance of a strange creature upon the moor. ¹⁴Twice I have with my own ears heard the sound which resembled the distant baying of a hound. ¹⁵It is incredible, impossible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of nature. ¹⁶A spectral hound which leaves material footmarks and fills the air with its howling is surely not to be thought of. ¹⁷Stapleton may fall in with such a superstition, and Mortimer also; but if I have one quality upon earth it is common-sense, and nothing will persuade me to believe in such a thing. ¹⁸To do so would be to descend to the level of these poor peasants, who are not content with a mere fiend dog but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes. ¹⁹Holmes would not listen to such fancies, and I am his agent. ²⁰But facts are facts, and I have twice heard this crying upon the moor. ²¹Suppose that there were really some huge hound loose upon it; that would go far to explain everything. ²²But where could such a hound lie concealed, where did it get its food, where did it come from, how was it that no one saw it by day? ²³It must be confessed that the natural explanation offers almost as many difficulties as the other. ²⁴And always, apart from the hound, there is the fact of the human agency in London, the man in the cab, and the letter which warned Sir Henry against the moor. ²⁵This at least was real, but it might have been the work of a protecting friend as easily as of an enemy. ²⁶Where is that friend or enemy now? ²⁷Has he remained in London, or has he followed us down here? ²⁸Could he—could he be the stranger whom I saw upon the tor?

²⁹It is true that I have had only the one glance at him, and yet there are some things to which I am ready to swear. ³⁰He is no one whom I have seen down here, and I have now met all the neighbours. ³¹The figure was far taller than that of Stapleton, far thinner than that of Frankland. ³²Barrymore it might possibly have been, but we had left him behind us, and I am certain that he could not have followed us. ³³A stranger then is still dogging us, just as a stranger dogged us in London. ³⁴We have never shaken him off. ³⁵If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties. ³⁶To this one purpose I must now devote all my energies.

³⁷My first impulse was to tell Sir Henry all my plans. ³⁸My second and wisest one is to play my own game and speak as little as possible to anyone. ³⁹He is silent and distraught. ⁴⁰His nerves have been strangely shaken by that sound upon the moor. ⁴¹I will say nothing to add to his anxieties, but I will take my own steps to attain my own end.

⁴²We had a small scene this morning after breakfast. ⁴³Barrymore asked leave to speak with Sir Henry, and they were closeted in his study some little time. ⁴⁴Sitting in the billiard-room I more than once heard the sound of voices raised, and I had a pretty good idea what the point was which was under discussion.

⁴⁵After a time the baronet opened his door and called for me.

⁴⁶“Barrymore considers that he has a grievance,” he said. ⁴⁷“He thinks that it was unfair on our part to hunt his brother-in-law down when he, of his own free will, had told us the secret.”

⁴⁸The butler was standing very pale but very collected before us.

⁴⁹“I may have spoken too warmly, sir,” said he, “and if I have, I am sure that I beg your pardon. ⁵⁰At the same time, I was very much surprised when I heard you two gentlemen come back this morning and learned that you had been chasing Selden. ⁵¹The poor fellow has enough to fight against without my putting more upon his track.”

⁵²“If you had told us of your own free will it would have been a different thing,” said the baronet, “you only told us, or rather your wife only told us, when it was forced from you and you could not help yourself.”

⁵³“I didn't think you would have taken advantage of it, Sir Henry—indeed I didn't.”

⁵⁴“The man is a public danger. ⁵⁵There are lonely houses scattered over the moor, and he is a fellow who would stick at nothing. ⁵⁶You only want to get a glimpse of his face to see that. ⁵⁷Look at Mr. Stapleton's house, for example, with no one but himself to defend it. ⁵⁸There's no safety for anyone until he is under lock and key.”

⁵⁹“He'll break into no house, sir. ⁶⁰I give you my solemn word upon that. ⁶¹But he will never trouble anyone in this country again. ⁶²I assure you, Sir Henry, that in a very few days the necessary arrangements will have been made and he will be on his way to South America. ⁶³For God's sake, sir, I beg of you not to let the police know that he is still on the moor. ⁶⁴They have given up the chase there, and he can lie quiet until the ship is ready for him. ⁶⁵You can't tell on him without getting my wife and me into trouble. ⁶⁶I beg you, sir, to say nothing to the police.”

⁶⁷“What do you say, Watson?”

⁶⁸I shrugged my shoulders. ⁶⁹“If he were safely out of the country it would relieve the tax-payer of a burden.”

⁷⁰“But how about the chance of his holding someone up before he goes?”

⁷¹“He would not do anything so mad, sir. ⁷²We have provided him with all that he can want. ⁷³To commit a crime would be to show where he was hiding.”

⁷⁴“That is true,” said Sir Henry. ⁷⁵“Well, Barrymore—”

⁷⁶“God bless you, sir, and thank you from my heart! ⁷⁷It would have killed my poor wife had he been taken again.”

⁷⁸“I guess we are aiding and abetting a felony, Watson? ⁷⁹But, after what we have heard I don't feel as if I could give the man up, so there is an end of it. ⁸⁰All right, Barrymore, you can go.”

⁸¹With a few broken words of gratitude the man turned, but he hesitated and then came back.

⁸²“You've been so kind to us, sir, that I should like to do the best I can for you in return. ⁸³I know something, Sir Henry, and perhaps I should have said it before, but it was long after the inquest that I found it out. ⁸⁴I've never breathed a word about it yet to mortal man. ⁸⁵It's about poor Sir Charles's death.”

⁸⁶“The baronet and I were both upon our feet. ⁸⁷“Do you know how he died?”

⁸⁸“No, sir, I don't know that.”

⁸⁹“What then?”

⁹⁰“I know why he was at the gate at that hour. ⁹¹It was to meet a woman.”

⁹²“To meet a woman! ⁹³He?”

⁹⁴“Yes, sir.”

⁹⁵“And the woman's name?”

⁹⁶“I can't give you the name, sir, but I can give you the initials. ⁹⁷Her initials were L. L.”

⁹⁸“How do you know this, Barrymore?”

⁹⁹“Well, Sir Henry, your uncle had a letter that morning. ¹⁰⁰He had usually a great many letters, for he was a public man and well known for his kind heart, so that everyone who was in trouble was glad to turn to him. ¹⁰¹But that morning, as it chanced, there was only this one letter, so I took the more notice of it. ¹⁰²It was from Coombe Tracey, and it was addressed in a woman's hand.”

¹⁰³“Well?”

¹⁰⁴“Well, sir, I thought no more of the matter, and never would have done had it not been for my wife. ¹⁰⁵Only a few weeks ago she was cleaning out Sir Charles's study—it had never been touched since his death—and she found the ashes of a burned letter in the back of the grate. ¹⁰⁶The greater part of it was charred to pieces, but one little slip, the end of a page, hung together, and the writing could still be read, though it was gray on a black ground. ¹⁰⁷It seemed to us to be a postscript at the end of the letter, and it said: ¹⁰⁸“Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o'clock”. ¹⁰⁹Beneath it were signed the initials L. L.”

¹¹⁰“Have you got that slip?”

¹¹¹“No, sir, it crumbled all to bits after we moved it.”

¹¹²“Had Sir Charles received any other letters in the same writing?”

¹¹³“Well, sir, I took no particular notice of his letters. ¹¹⁴I should not have noticed this one, only it happened to come alone.”

¹¹⁵“And you have no idea who L. L. is?”

¹¹⁶“No, sir. ¹¹⁷No more than you have. ¹¹⁸But I expect if we could lay our hands upon that lady we should know more about Sir Charles's death.”

¹¹⁹“I cannot understand, Barrymore, how you came to conceal this important information.”

¹²⁰“Well, sir, it was immediately after that our own trouble came to us. ¹²¹And then again, sir, we were both of us very fond of Sir Charles, as we well might be considering all that he has done for us. ¹²²To rake this up couldn't help our poor master, and it's well to go carefully when there's a lady in the case. ¹²³Even the best of us—”

¹²⁴“You thought it might injure his reputation?”

¹²⁵“Well, sir, I thought no good could come of it. ¹²⁶But now you have been kind to us, and I feel as if it would be treating you unfairly not to tell you all that I know about the matter.”

¹²⁷“Very good, Barrymore; you can go.” ¹²⁸When the butler had left us Sir Henry turned to me. ¹²⁹“Well, Watson, what do you think of this new light?”

¹³⁰“It seems to leave the darkness rather blacker than before.”

¹³¹“So I think. ¹³²But if we can only trace L. L. it should clear up the whole business. ¹³³We have gained that much. ¹³⁴We know that there is someone who has the facts if we can only find her. ¹³⁵What do you think we should do?”

¹³⁶“Let Holmes know all about it at once. ¹³⁷It will give him the clue for which he has been seeking. ¹³⁸I am much mistaken if it does not bring him down.”

¹³⁹I went at once to my room and drew up my report of the morning's conversation for Holmes. ¹⁴⁰It was evident to me that he had been very busy of late, for the notes which I had from Baker Street were few and short, with no comments upon the information which I had supplied and hardly any reference to my mission. ¹⁴¹No doubt his blackmailing case is absorbing all his faculties. ¹⁴²And yet this new factor must surely arrest his attention and renew his interest. ¹⁴³I wish that he were here.

¹⁴⁴October 17th.— ¹⁴⁵All day to-day the rain poured down, rustling on the ivy and dripping from the eaves. ¹⁴⁶I thought of the convict out upon the bleak, cold, shelterless moor. ¹⁴⁷Poor devil! ¹⁴⁸Whatever his crimes, he has suffered something to atone for them. ¹⁴⁹And then I thought of that other one—the face in the cab, the figure against the moon. ¹⁵⁰Was he also out in that deluged—the unseen watcher, the man of darkness? ¹⁵¹In the evening I put on my waterproof and I walked far upon the sodden moor, full of dark imaginings, the rain beating upon my face and the wind whistling about my ears. ¹⁵²God help those who wander into the great mire now, for even the firm uplands are becoming a morass. ¹⁵³I found the black tor upon which I had seen the solitary watcher, and from its craggy summit I looked out myself across the melancholy downs. ¹⁵⁴Rain squalls drifted across their russet face, and the heavy, slate-coloured clouds hung low over the landscape, trailing in gray wreaths down the sides of the fantastic hills. ¹⁵⁵In the distant hollow on the left, half hidden by the mist, the two thin towers of Baskerville Hall rose above the trees. ¹⁵⁶They were the only signs of human life which I could see, save only those prehistoric huts which lay thickly upon the slopes of the hills. ¹⁵⁷Nowhere was there any trace of that lonely man whom I had seen on the same spot two nights before.

¹⁵⁸As I walked back I was overtaken by Dr. Mortimer driving in his dog-cart over a rough moorland track which led from the outlying farmhouse of Foulmire. ¹⁵⁹He has been very attentive to us, and hardly a day has passed that he has not called at the Hall to see how we were getting on. ¹⁶⁰He insisted upon my climbing into his dog-cart, and he gave me a lift homeward. ¹⁶¹I found him much troubled over the disappearance of his little spaniel. ¹⁶²It had wandered on to the moor and had never come back. ¹⁶³I gave him such consolation as I might, but I thought of the pony on the Grimpen Mire, and I do not fancy that he will see his little dog again.

¹⁶⁴“By the way, Mortimer,” said I as we jolted along the rough road, “I suppose there are few people living within driving distance of this whom you do not know?”

¹⁶⁵“Hardly any, I think.”

¹⁶⁶“Can you, then, tell me the name of any woman whose initials are L. L.?”

¹⁶⁷He thought for a few minutes.

¹⁶⁸“No,” said he. ¹⁶⁹“There are a few gipsies and labouring folk for whom I can't answer, but among the farmers or gentry there is no one whose initials are those. ¹⁷⁰Wait a bit though,” he added after a pause.

¹⁷¹“There is Laura Lyons—her initials are L. L.—but she lives in Coombe Tracey.”

¹⁷²“Who is she?” I asked.

¹⁷³“She is Frankland's daughter.”

¹⁷⁴“What! ¹⁷⁵Old Frankland the crank?”

¹⁷⁶“Exactly. ¹⁷⁷She married an artist named Lyons, who came sketching on the moor. ¹⁷⁸He proved to be a blackguard and deserted her. ¹⁷⁹The fault from what I hear may not have been entirely on one side. ¹⁸⁰Her father refused to have anything to do with her because she had married without his consent, and perhaps for one or two other reasons as well. ¹⁸¹So, between the old sinner and the young one the girl has had a pretty bad time.”

¹⁸²“How does she live?”

¹⁸³“I fancy old Frankland allows her a pittance, but it cannot be more, for his own affairs are considerably involved. ¹⁸⁴Whatever she may have deserved one could not allow her to go hopelessly to the bad. ¹⁸⁵Her story got about, and several of the people here did something to enable her to earn an honest living. ¹⁸⁶Stapleton did for one, and Sir Charles for another. ¹⁸⁷I gave a trifle myself. ¹⁸⁸It was to set her up in a typewriting business.”

¹⁸⁹He wanted to know the object of my inquiries, but I managed to satisfy his curiosity without telling him too much, for there is no reason why we should take anyone into our confidence. ¹⁹⁰To-morrow morning I shall find my way to Coombe Tracey, and if I can see this Mrs. Laura Lyons, of equivocal reputation, a long step will have been made towards clearing one incident in this chain of mysteries. ¹⁹¹I am certainly developing the wisdom of the serpent, for when Mortimer pressed his questions to an inconvenient extent I asked him casually to what type Frankland's skull belonged, and so heard nothing but craniology for the rest of our drive. ¹⁹²I have not lived for years with Sherlock Holmes for nothing.

¹⁹³I have only one other incident to record upon this tempestuous and melancholy day. ¹⁹⁴This was my conversation with Barrymore just now, which gives me one more strong card which I can play in due time.

¹⁹⁵Mortimer had stayed to dinner, and he and the baronet played écarté afterwards. ¹⁹⁶The butler brought me my coffee into the library, and I took the chance to ask him a few questions.

¹⁹⁷“Well,” said I, “has this precious relation of yours departed, or is he still lurking out yonder?”

¹⁹⁸“I don't know, sir. ¹⁹⁹I hope to heaven that he has gone, for he has brought nothing but trouble here! ²⁰⁰I've not heard of him since I left out food for him last, and that was three days ago.”

²⁰¹“Did you see him then?”

²⁰²“No, sir, but the food was gone when next I went that way.”

²⁰³“Then he was certainly there?”

²⁰⁴“So you would think, sir, unless it was the other man who took it.”

²⁰⁵I sat with my coffee-cup halfway to my lips and stared at Barrymore.

²⁰⁶“You know that there is another man then?”

²⁰⁷“Yes, sir; there is another man upon the moor.”

²⁰⁸“Have you seen him?”

²⁰⁹“No, sir.”

²¹⁰“How do you know of him then?”

²¹¹“Selden told me of him, sir, a week ago or more. ²¹²He's in hiding, too, but he's not a convict as far as I can make out. ²¹³I don't like it, Dr. Watson— ²¹⁴I tell you straight, sir, that I don't like it.” ²¹⁵He spoke with a sudden passion of earnestness.

²¹⁶“Now, listen to me, Barrymore! ²¹⁷I have no interest in this matter but that of your master. ²¹⁸I have come here with no object except to help him. ²¹⁹Tell me, frankly, what it is that you don't like.”

²²⁰Barrymore hesitated for a moment, as if he regretted his outburst, or found it difficult to express his own feelings in words.

²²¹“It's all these goings-on, sir,” he cried at last, waving his hand towards the rain-lashed window which faced the moor. ²²²“There's foul play somewhere, and there's black villainy brewing, to that I'll swear! ²²³Very glad I should be, sir, to see Sir Henry on his way back to London again!”

²²⁴“But what is it that alarms you?”

²²⁵“Look at Sir Charles's death! ²²⁶That was bad enough, for all that the coroner said. ²²⁷Look at the noises on the moor at night. ²²⁸There's not a man would cross it after sundown if he was paid for it. ²²⁹Look at this stranger hiding out yonder, and watching and waiting! ²³⁰What's he waiting for? ²³¹What does it mean? ²³²It means no good to anyone of the name of Baskerville, and very glad I shall be to be quit of it all on the day that Sir Henry's new servants are ready to take over the Hall.”

²³³“But about this stranger,” said I. ²³⁴“Can you tell me anything about him? ²³⁵What did Selden say? ²³⁶Did he find out where he hid, or what he was doing?”

²³⁷“He saw him once or twice, but he is a deep one, and gives nothing away. ²³⁸At first he thought that he was the police, but soon he found that he had some lay of his own. ²³⁹A kind of gentleman he was, as far as he could see, but what he was doing he could not make out.”

²⁴⁰“And where did he say that he lived?”

²⁴¹“Among the old houses on the hillside—the stone huts where the old folk used to live.”

²⁴²“But how about his food?”

²⁴³“Selden found out that he has got a lad who works for him and brings him all he needs. ²⁴⁴I dare say he goes to Coombe Tracey for what he wants.”

²⁴⁵“Very good, Barrymore. ²⁴⁶We may talk further of this some other time.” ²⁴⁷When the butler had gone I walked over to the black window, and I looked through a blurred pane at the driving clouds and at the tossing outline of the wind-swept trees. ²⁴⁸It is a wild night indoors, and what must it be in a stone hut upon the moor. ²⁴⁹What passion of hatred can it be which leads a man to lurk in such a place at such a time! ²⁵⁰And what deep and earnest purpose can he have which calls for such a trial! ²⁵¹There, in that hut upon the moor, seems to lie the very centre of that problem which has vexed me so sorely. ²⁵²I swear that another day shall not have passed before I have done all that man can do to reach the heart of the mystery.

Chapter XI.

The Man on the Tor

¹The extract from my private diary which forms the last chapter has brought my narrative up to the 18th of October, a time when these strange events began to move swiftly towards their terrible conclusion.

²The incidents of the next few days are indelibly graven upon my recollection, and I can tell them without reference to the notes made at the time. ³I start then from the day which succeeded that upon which I had established two facts of great importance, the one that Mrs. Laura Lyons of Coombe Tracey had written to Sir Charles Baskerville and made an appointment with him at the very place and hour that he met his death, the other that the lurking man upon the moor was to be found among the stone huts upon the hill-side. ⁴With these two facts in my possession I felt that either my intelligence or my courage must be deficient if I could not throw some further light upon these dark places.

⁵I had no opportunity to tell the baronet what I had learned about Mrs. Lyons upon the evening before, for Dr. Mortimer remained with him at cards until it was very late. ⁶At breakfast, however, I informed him about my discovery, and asked him whether he would care to accompany me to Coombe Tracey. ⁷At first he was very eager to come, but on second thoughts it seemed to both of us that if I went alone the results might be better. ⁸The more formal we made the visit the less information we might obtain. ⁹I left Sir Henry behind, therefore, not without some prickings of conscience, and drove off upon my new quest.

¹⁰When I reached Coombe Tracey I told Perkins to put up the horses, and I made inquiries for the lady whom I had come to interrogate. ¹¹I had no difficulty in finding her rooms, which were central and well appointed. ¹²A maid showed me in without ceremony, and as I entered the sitting-room a lady, who was sitting before a Remington typewriter, sprang up with a pleasant smile of welcome. ¹³Her face fell, however, when she saw that I was a stranger, and she sat down again and asked me the object of my visit.

¹⁴The first impression left by Mrs. Lyons was one of extreme beauty. ¹⁵Her eyes and hair were of the same rich hazel colour, and her cheeks, though considerably freckled, were flushed with the exquisite bloom of the brunette, the dainty pink which lurks at the heart of the sulphur rose. ¹⁶Admiration was, I repeat, the first impression. ¹⁷But the second was criticism. ¹⁸There was something subtly wrong with the face, some coarseness of expression, some hardness, perhaps, of eye, some looseness of lip which marred its perfect beauty. ¹⁹But these, of course, are after-thoughts. ²⁰At the moment I was simply conscious that I was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that she was asking me the reasons for my visit. ²¹I had not quite understood until that instant how delicate my mission was.

²²"I have the pleasure," said I, "of knowing your father." ²³It was a clumsy introduction, and the lady made me feel it.

²⁴"There is nothing in common between my father and me," she said. ²⁵"I owe him nothing, and his friends are not mine. ²⁶If it were not for the late Sir Charles Baskerville and some other kind hearts I might have starved for all that my father cared."

²⁷"It was about the late Sir Charles Baskerville that I have come here to see you."

²⁸The freckles started out on the lady's face.

²⁹"What can I tell you about him?" she asked, and her fingers played nervously over the stops of her typewriter.

³⁰"You knew him, did you not?"

³¹“I have already said that I owe a great deal to his kindness. ³²If I am able to support myself it is largely due to the interest which he took in my unhappy situation.”

³³“Did you correspond with him?”

³⁴The lady looked quickly up with an angry gleam in her hazel eyes.

³⁵“What is the object of these questions?” she asked sharply.

³⁶“The object is to avoid a public scandal. ³⁷It is better that I should ask them here than that the matter should pass outside our control.”

³⁸She was silent and her face was still very pale. ³⁹At last she looked up with something reckless and defiant in her manner.

⁴⁰“Well, I'll answer,” she said. ⁴¹“What are your questions?”

⁴²“Did you correspond with Sir Charles?”

⁴³“I certainly wrote to him once or twice to acknowledge his delicacy and his generosity.”

⁴⁴“Have you the dates of those letters?”

⁴⁵“No.”

⁴⁶“Have you ever met him?”

⁴⁷“Yes, once or twice, when he came into Coombe Tracey. ⁴⁸He was a very retiring man, and he preferred to do good by stealth.”

⁴⁹“But if you saw him so seldom and wrote so seldom, how did he know enough about your affairs to be able to help you, as you say that he has done?”

⁵⁰She met my difficulty with the utmost readiness.

⁵¹“There were several gentlemen who knew my sad history and united to help me. ⁵²One was Mr. Stapleton, a neighbour and intimate friend of Sir Charles's. ⁵³He was exceedingly kind, and it was through him that Sir Charles learned about my affairs.”

⁵⁴I knew already that Sir Charles Baskerville had made Stapleton his almoner upon several occasions, so the lady's statement bore the impress of truth upon it.

⁵⁵“Did you ever write to Sir Charles asking him to meet you?” I continued.

⁵⁶Mrs. Lyons flushed with anger again.

⁵⁷“Really, sir, this is a very extraordinary question.”

⁵⁸“I am sorry, madam, but I must repeat it.”

⁵⁹“Then I answer, certainly not.”

⁶⁰“Not on the very day of Sir Charles's death?”

⁶¹The flush had faded in an instant, and a deathly face was before me. ⁶²Her dry lips could not speak the “No” which I saw rather than heard.

⁶³“Surely your memory deceives you,” said I. ⁶⁴“I could even quote a passage of your letter. ⁶⁵It ran ‘Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o'clock.’”

⁶⁶I thought that she had fainted, but she recovered herself by a supreme effort.

⁶⁷“Is there no such thing as a gentleman?” she gasped.

⁶⁸“You do Sir Charles an injustice. ⁶⁹He did burn the letter. ⁷⁰But sometimes a letter may be legible even when burned. ⁷¹You acknowledge now that you wrote it?”

⁷²“Yes, I did write it,” she cried, pouring out her soul in a torrent of words. ⁷³“I did write it. ⁷⁴Why should I deny it? ⁷⁵I have no reason to be ashamed of it. ⁷⁶I wished him to help me. ⁷⁷I believed that if I had an interview I could gain his help, so I asked him to meet me.”

⁷⁸“But why at such an hour?”

⁷⁹“Because I had only just learned that he was going to London next day and might be away for months. ⁸⁰There were reasons why I could not get there earlier.”

⁸¹“But why a rendezvous in the garden instead of a visit to the house?”

⁸²“Do you think a woman could go alone at that hour to a bachelor's house?”

⁸³“Well, what happened when you did get there?”

⁸⁴“I never went.”

⁸⁵“Mrs. Lyons!”

⁸⁶“No, I swear it to you on all I hold sacred. ⁸⁷I never went. ⁸⁸Something intervened to prevent my going.”

⁸⁹“What was that?”

⁹⁰“That is a private matter. ⁹¹I cannot tell it.”

⁹²“You acknowledge then that you made an appointment with Sir Charles at the very hour and place at which he met his death, but you deny that you kept the appointment.”

⁹³“That is the truth.”

⁹⁴Again and again I cross-questioned her, but I could never get past that point.

⁹⁵“Mrs. Lyons,” said I, as I rose from this long and inconclusive interview, “you are taking a very great responsibility and putting yourself in a very false position by not making an absolutely clean breast of all that you know. ⁹⁶If I have to call in the aid of the police you will find how seriously you are compromised. ⁹⁷If your position is innocent, why did you in the first instance deny having written to Sir Charles upon that date?”

⁹⁸“Because I feared that some false conclusion might be drawn from it and that I might find myself involved in a scandal.”

⁹⁹“And why were you so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy your letter?”

¹⁰⁰“If you have read the letter you will know.”

¹⁰¹“I did not say that I had read all the letter.”

¹⁰²“You quoted some of it.”

¹⁰³“I quoted the postscript. ¹⁰⁴The letter had, as I said, been burned and it was not all legible. ¹⁰⁵I ask you once again why it was that you were so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy this letter which he received on the day of his death.”

¹⁰⁶“The matter is a very private one.”

¹⁰⁷“The more reason why you should avoid a public investigation.”

¹⁰⁸“I will tell you, then. ¹⁰⁹If you have heard anything of my unhappy history you will know that I made a rash marriage and had reason to regret it.”

¹¹⁰“I have heard so much.”

¹¹¹“My life has been one incessant persecution from a husband whom I abhor. ¹¹²The law is upon his side, and every day I am faced by the possibility that he may force me to live with him. ¹¹³At the time that I wrote this letter to Sir Charles I had learned that there was a prospect of my regaining my freedom if certain expenses could be met. ¹¹⁴It meant everything to me—peace of mind, happiness, self-respect—everything. ¹¹⁵I knew Sir Charles's generosity, and I thought that if he heard the story from my own lips he would help me.”

¹¹⁶“Then how is it that you did not go?”

¹¹⁷“Because I received help in the interval from another source.”

¹¹⁸“Why then, did you not write to Sir Charles and explain this?”

¹¹⁹“So I should have done had I not seen his death in the paper next morning.”

¹²⁰The woman's story hung coherently together, and all my questions were unable to shake it. ¹²¹I could only check it by finding if she had, indeed, instituted divorce proceedings against her husband at or about the time of the tragedy.

¹²²It was unlikely that she would dare to say that she had not been to Baskerville Hall if she really had been, for a trap would be necessary to take her there, and could not have returned to Coombe Tracey until the early hours of the morning. ¹²³Such an excursion could not be kept secret. ¹²⁴The probability was, therefore, that she was telling the truth, or, at least, a part of the truth. ¹²⁵I came away baffled and disheartened. ¹²⁶Once again I had reached that dead wall which seemed to be built across every path by which I tried to get at the object of my mission. ¹²⁷And yet the more I thought of the lady's face and of her manner the more I felt that something was being held back from me. ¹²⁸Why should she turn so pale? ¹²⁹Why should she fight against every admission until it was forced from her? ¹³⁰Why should she have been so reticent at the time of the tragedy? ¹³¹Surely the explanation of all this could not be as innocent as she would have me believe. ¹³²For the moment I could proceed no farther in that direction, but must turn back to that other clue which was to be sought for among the stone huts upon the moor.

¹³³And that was a most vague direction. ¹³⁴I realized it as I drove back and noted how hill after hill showed traces of the ancient people. ¹³⁵Barrymore's only indication had been that the stranger lived in one of these abandoned huts, and many hundreds of them are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the moor. ¹³⁶But I had my own experience for a guide since it had shown me the man himself standing upon the summit of the Black Tor. ¹³⁷That then should be the centre of my search. ¹³⁸From there I should explore every hut upon the moor until I lighted upon the right one. ¹³⁹If this man were inside it I should find out from his own lips, at the point of my revolver if necessary, who he was and why he had dogged us so long. ¹⁴⁰He might slip away from us in the crowd of Regent Street, but it would puzzle him to do so upon the lonely moor. ¹⁴¹On the other hand, if I should find the hut and its tenant should not be within it I must remain there, however long the vigil, until he returned. ¹⁴²Holmes had missed him in London. ¹⁴³It would indeed be a triumph for me if I could run him to earth, where my master had failed.

¹⁴⁴Luck had been against us again and again in this inquiry, but now at last it came to my aid. ¹⁴⁵And the messenger of good fortune was none other than Mr. Frankland, who was standing, gray-whiskered and red-faced, outside the gate of his garden, which opened on to the high road along which I travelled.

¹⁴⁶“Good-day, Dr. Watson,” cried he with unwonted good humour, “you must really give your horses a rest, and come in to have a glass of wine and to congratulate me.”

¹⁴⁷My feelings towards him were very far from being friendly after what I had heard of his treatment of his daughter, but I was anxious to send Perkins and the wagonette home, and the opportunity was a good one. ¹⁴⁸I alighted and sent a message to Sir Henry that I should walk over in time for dinner.

¹⁴⁹Then I followed Frankland into his dining-room.

¹⁵⁰“It is a great day for me, sir—one of the red-letter days of my life,” he cried with many chuckles.

¹⁵¹“I have brought off a double event. ¹⁵²I mean to teach them in these parts that law is law, and that there is a man here who does not fear to invoke it. ¹⁵³I have established a right of way through the centre of old Middleton's park, slap across it, sir, within a hundred yards of his own front door. ¹⁵⁴What do you think of that? ¹⁵⁵We'll teach these magnates that they cannot ride roughshod over the rights of the commoners, confound them! ¹⁵⁶And I've closed the wood where the Fernworthy folk used to picnic. ¹⁵⁷These infernal people seem to think that there are no rights of property, and that they can swarm where they like with their papers and their bottles. ¹⁵⁸Both cases decided, Dr. Watson, and both in my favour. ¹⁵⁹I haven't had such a day since I had Sir John Morland for trespass, because he shot in his own warren.”

¹⁶⁰“How on earth did you do that?”

¹⁶¹“Look it up in the books, sir. ¹⁶²It will repay reading—Frankland v. Morland, Court of Queen's Bench.

¹⁶³It cost me 200 pounds, but I got my verdict.”

¹⁶⁴“Did it do you any good?”

¹⁶⁵“None, sir, none. ¹⁶⁶I am proud to say that I had no interest in the matter. ¹⁶⁷I act entirely from a sense of public duty. ¹⁶⁸I have no doubt, for example, that the Fernworthy people will burn me in effigy to-night. ¹⁶⁹I told the police last time they did it that they should stop these disgraceful exhibitions. ¹⁷⁰The County Constabulary is in a scandalous state, sir, and it has not afforded me the protection to which I am entitled. ¹⁷¹The case of Frankland v. Regina will bring the matter before the attention of the public. ¹⁷²I told them that they would have occasion to regret their treatment of me, and already my words have come true.”

¹⁷³“How so?” I asked.

¹⁷⁴The old man put on a very knowing expression.

¹⁷⁵“Because I could tell them what they are dying to know; but nothing would induce me to help the rascals in any way.”

¹⁷⁶I had been casting round for some excuse by which I could get away from his gossip, but now I began to wish to hear more of it. ¹⁷⁷I had seen enough of the contrary nature of the old sinner to understand that any strong sign of interest would be the surest way to stop his confidences.

¹⁷⁸“Some poaching case, no doubt?” said I, with an indifferent manner.

¹⁷⁹“Ha, ha, my boy, a very much more important matter than that! ¹⁸⁰What about the convict on the moor?”

¹⁸¹I started. ¹⁸²“You don't mean that you know where he is?” said I.

¹⁸³“I may not know exactly where he is, but I am quite sure that I could help the police to lay their hands on him. ¹⁸⁴Has it never struck you that the way to catch that man was to find out where he got his food, and so trace it to him?”

¹⁸⁵He certainly seemed to be getting uncomfortably near the truth. ¹⁸⁶“No doubt,” said I; “but how do you know that he is anywhere upon the moor?”

¹⁸⁷“I know it because I have seen with my own eyes the messenger who takes him his food.”

¹⁸⁸My heart sank for Barrymore. ¹⁸⁹It was a serious thing to be in the power of this spiteful old busybody. ¹⁹⁰But his next remark took a weight from my mind.

¹⁹¹“You’ll be surprised to hear that his food is taken to him by a child. ¹⁹²I see him every day through my telescope upon the roof. ¹⁹³He passes along the same path at the same hour, and to whom should he be going except to the convict?”

¹⁹⁴Here was luck indeed! ¹⁹⁵And yet I suppressed all appearance of interest. ¹⁹⁶A child! ¹⁹⁷Barrymore had said that our unknown was supplied by a boy. ¹⁹⁸It was on his track, and not upon the convict’s, that Frankland had stumbled. ¹⁹⁹If I could get his knowledge it might save me a long and weary hunt. ²⁰⁰But incredulity and indifference were evidently my strongest cards.

²⁰¹“I should say that it was much more likely that it was the son of one of the moorland shepherds taking out his father’s dinner.”

²⁰²The least appearance of opposition struck fire out of the old autocrat. ²⁰³His eyes looked malignantly at me, and his gray whiskers bristled like those of an angry cat.

²⁰⁴“Indeed, sir!” said he, pointing out over the wide-stretching moor. ²⁰⁵“Do you see that Black Tor over yonder? ²⁰⁶Well, do you see the low hill beyond with the thornbush upon it? ²⁰⁷It is the stoniest part of the whole moor. ²⁰⁸Is that a place where a shepherd would be likely to take his station? ²⁰⁹Your suggestion, sir, is a most absurd one.”

²¹⁰I meekly answered that I had spoken without knowing all the facts. ²¹¹My submission pleased him and led him to further confidences.

²¹²“You may be sure, sir, that I have very good grounds before I come to an opinion. ²¹³I have seen the boy again and again with his bundle. ²¹⁴Every day, and sometimes twice a day, I have been able—but wait a moment, Dr. Watson. ²¹⁵Do my eyes deceive me, or is there at the present moment something moving upon that hill-side?”

²¹⁶It was several miles off, but I could distinctly see a small dark dot against the dull green and gray.

²¹⁷“Come, sir, come!” cried Frankland, rushing upstairs. ²¹⁸“You will see with your own eyes and judge for yourself.”

²¹⁹The telescope, a formidable instrument mounted upon a tripod, stood upon the flat leads of the house.

²²⁰Frankland clapped his eye to it and gave a cry of satisfaction.

²²¹“Quick, Dr. Watson, quick, before he passes over the hill!”

²²²There he was, sure enough, a small urchin with a little bundle upon his shoulder, toiling slowly up the hill. ²²³When he reached the crest I saw the ragged uncouth figure outlined for an instant against the cold blue sky. ²²⁴He looked round him with a furtive and stealthy air, as one who dreads pursuit. ²²⁵Then he vanished over the hill.

²²⁶“Well! ²²⁷Am I right?”

²²⁸“Certainly, there is a boy who seems to have some secret errand.”

²²⁹“And what the errand is even a county constable could guess. ²³⁰But not one word shall they have from me, and I bind you to secrecy also, Dr. Watson. ²³¹Not a word! ²³²You understand!”

²³³“Just as you wish.”

²³⁴“They have treated me shamefully—shamefully. ²³⁵When the facts come out in *Frankland v. Regina* I venture to think that a thrill of indignation will run through the country. ²³⁶Nothing would induce me to help the police in any way. ²³⁷For all they cared it might have been me, instead of my effigy, which these rascals burned at the stake. ²³⁸Surely you are not going! ²³⁹You will help me to empty the decanter in honour of this great occasion!”

²⁴⁰But I resisted all his solicitations and succeeded in dissuading him from his announced intention of walking home with me. ²⁴¹I kept the road as long as his eye was on me, and then I struck off across the moor and made for the stony hill over which the boy had disappeared. ²⁴²Everything was working in my favour, and I swore that it should not be through lack of energy or perseverance that I should miss the chance which fortune had thrown in my way.

²⁴³The sun was already sinking when I reached the summit of the hill, and the long slopes beneath me were all golden-green on one side and gray shadow on the other. ²⁴⁴A haze lay low upon the farthest sky-line, out of which jutted the fantastic shapes of Belliver and Vixen Tor. ²⁴⁵Over the wide expanse there was no sound and no movement. ²⁴⁶One great gray bird, a gull or curlew, soared aloft in the blue heaven. ²⁴⁷He and I seemed to be the only living things between the huge arch of the sky and the desert beneath it. ²⁴⁸The barren scene, the sense of loneliness, and the mystery and urgency of my task all struck a chill into my heart. ²⁴⁹The boy was nowhere to be seen. ²⁵⁰But down beneath me in a cleft of the hills there was a circle of the old stone huts, and in the middle of them there was one which retained sufficient roof to act as a screen against the weather. ²⁵¹My heart leaped within me as I saw it. ²⁵²This must be the burrow where the stranger lurked. ²⁵³At last my foot was on the threshold of his hiding place—his secret was within my grasp.

²⁵⁴As I approached the hut, walking as warily as Stapleton would do when with poised net he drew near the settled butterfly, I satisfied myself that the place had indeed been used as a habitation. ²⁵⁵A vague pathway among the boulders led to the dilapidated opening which served as a door. ²⁵⁶All was silent within. ²⁵⁷The unknown might be lurking there, or he might be prowling on the moor. ²⁵⁸My nerves tingled with the sense of adventure. ²⁵⁹Throwing aside my cigarette, I closed my hand upon the butt of my revolver and, walking swiftly up to the door, I looked in. ²⁶⁰The place was empty.

²⁶¹But there were ample signs that I had not come upon a false scent. ²⁶²This was certainly where the man lived. ²⁶³Some blankets rolled in a waterproof lay upon that very stone slab upon which Neolithic man had once slumbered. ²⁶⁴The ashes of a fire were heaped in a rude grate. ²⁶⁵Beside it lay some cooking utensils and a bucket half-full of water. ²⁶⁶A litter of empty tins showed that the place had been occupied for some time, and I saw, as my eyes became accustomed to the checkered light, a pannikin and a half-full bottle of spirits standing in the corner. ²⁶⁷In the middle of the hut a flat stone served the purpose of a table, and upon this stood a small cloth bundle—the same, no doubt, which I had seen through the telescope upon the shoulder of the boy. ²⁶⁸It contained a loaf of bread, a tinned tongue, and two tins of preserved peaches. ²⁶⁹As I set it down again, after having examined it, my heart leaped to see that beneath it there lay a sheet of paper with writing upon it. ²⁷⁰I raised it, and this was what I read, roughly scrawled in pencil:—

²⁷¹Dr. Watson has gone to Coombe Tracey.

²⁷²For a minute I stood there with the paper in my hands thinking out the meaning of this curt message. ²⁷³It was I, then, and not Sir Henry, who was being dogged by this secret man. ²⁷⁴He had not followed me himself, but he had set an agent—the boy, perhaps—upon my track, and this was his report. ²⁷⁵Possibly I had taken no step since I had been upon the moor which had not been observed and reported. ²⁷⁶Always there was this feeling of an unseen force, a fine net drawn round us with infinite skill and delicacy, holding us so lightly that it was only at some supreme moment that one realized that one was indeed entangled in its meshes.

²⁷⁷If there was one report there might be others, so I looked round the hut in search of them. ²⁷⁸There was no trace, however, of anything of the kind, nor could I discover any sign which might indicate the character or intentions of the man who lived in this singular place, save that he must be of Spartan habits and cared little for the comforts of life. ²⁷⁹When I thought of the heavy rains and looked at the gaping roof I understood how strong and immutable must be the purpose which had kept him in that inhospitable abode. ²⁸⁰Was he our malignant enemy, or was he by chance our guardian angel? ²⁸¹I swore that I would not leave the hut until I knew.

²⁸²Outside the sun was sinking low and the west was blazing with scarlet and gold. ²⁸³Its reflection was shot back in ruddy patches by the distant pools which lay amid the great Grimpen Mire. ²⁸⁴There were the two towers of Baskerville Hall, and there a distant blur of smoke which marked the village of Grimpen. ²⁸⁵Between the two, behind the hill, was the house of the Stapletons. ²⁸⁶All was sweet and mellow and peaceful in the golden evening light, and yet as I looked at them my soul shared none of the peace of nature but quivered at the vagueness and the terror of that interview which every instant was bringing nearer. ²⁸⁷With tingling nerves, but a fixed purpose, I sat in the dark recess of the hut and waited with sombre patience for the coming of its tenant.

²⁸⁸And then at last I heard him. ²⁸⁹Far away came the sharp clink of a boot striking upon a stone. ²⁹⁰Then another and yet another, coming nearer and nearer. ²⁹¹I shrank back into the darkest corner, and cocked the pistol in my pocket, determined not to discover myself until I had an opportunity of seeing something of the stranger. ²⁹²There was a long pause which showed that he had stopped. ²⁹³Then once more the footsteps approached and a shadow fell across the opening of the hut.

²⁹⁴“It is a lovely evening, my dear Watson,” said a well-known voice. ²⁹⁵“I really think that you will be more comfortable outside than in.”

Chapter XII.

Death on the Moor

¹For a moment or two I sat breathless, hardly able to believe my ears. ²Then my senses and my voice came back to me, while a crushing weight of responsibility seemed in an instant to be lifted from my soul. ³That cold, incisive, ironical voice could belong to but one man in all the world.

⁴“Holmes!” I cried— ⁵“Holmes!”

⁶“Come out,” said he, “and please be careful with the revolver.”

⁷I stooped under the rude lintel, and there he sat upon a stone outside, his gray eyes dancing with amusement as they fell upon my astonished features. ⁸He was thin and worn, but clear and alert, his keen face bronzed by the sun and roughened by the wind. ⁹In his tweed suit and cloth cap he looked like any other tourist upon the moor, and he had contrived, with that cat-like love of personal cleanliness which was one of his characteristics, that his chin should be as smooth and his linen as perfect as if he were in Baker Street.

¹⁰“I never was more glad to see anyone in my life,” said I, as I wrung him by the hand.

¹¹“Or more astonished, eh?”

¹²“Well, I must confess to it.”

¹³“The surprise was not all on one side, I assure you. ¹⁴I had no idea that you had found my occasional retreat, still less that you were inside it, until I was within twenty paces of the door.”

¹⁵“My footprint, I presume?”

¹⁶“No, Watson; I fear that I could not undertake to recognize your footprint amid all the footprints of the world. ¹⁷If you seriously desire to deceive me you must change your tobacconist; for when I see the stub of a cigarette marked Bradley, Oxford Street, I know that my friend Watson is in the neighbourhood. ¹⁸You will see it there beside the path. ¹⁹You threw it down, no doubt, at that supreme moment when you charged into the empty hut.”

¹⁹“Exactly.”

²⁰“I thought as much—and knowing your admirable tenacity I was convinced that you were sitting in ambush, a weapon within reach, waiting for the tenant to return. ²¹So you actually thought that I was the criminal?”

²²“I did not know who you were, but I was determined to find out.”

²³“Excellent, Watson! ²⁴And how did you localize me? ²⁵You saw me, perhaps, on the night of the convict hunt, when I was so imprudent as to allow the moon to rise behind me?”

²⁶“Yes, I saw you then.”

²⁷“And have no doubt searched all the huts until you came to this one?”

²⁸“No, your boy had been observed, and that gave me a guide where to look.”

²⁹“The old gentleman with the telescope, no doubt. ³⁰I could not make it out when first I saw the light flashing upon the lens.” ³¹He rose and peeped into the hut. ³²“Ha, I see that Cartwright has brought up some supplies. ³³What’s this paper? ³⁴So you have been to Coombe Tracey, have you?”

³⁵“Yes.”

³⁶“To see Mrs. Laura Lyons?”

³⁷“Exactly.”

³⁸“Well done! ³⁹Our researches have evidently been running on parallel lines, and when we unite our results I expect we shall have a fairly full knowledge of the case.”

⁴⁰“Well, I am glad from my heart that you are here, for indeed the responsibility and the mystery were both becoming too much for my nerves. ⁴¹But how in the name of wonder did you come here, and what have you been doing? ⁴²I thought that you were in Baker Street working out that case of blackmailing.”

⁴³“That was what I wished you to think.”

⁴⁴“Then you use me, and yet do not trust me!” I cried with some bitterness. ⁴⁵“I think that I have deserved better at your hands, Holmes.”

⁴⁶“My dear fellow, you have been invaluable to me in this as in many other cases, and I beg that you will forgive me if I have seemed to play a trick upon you. ⁴⁷In truth, it was partly for your own sake that I did it, and it was my appreciation of the danger which you ran which led me to come down and examine the matter for myself. ⁴⁸Had I been with Sir Henry and you it is confident that my point of view would have been the same as yours, and my presence would have warned our very formidable opponents to be on their guard. ⁴⁹As it is, I have been able to get about as I could not possibly have done had I been living in the Hall, and I remain an unknown factor in the business, ready to throw in all my weight at a critical moment.”

⁵⁰“But why keep me in the dark?”

⁵¹“For you to know could not have helped us, and might possibly have led to my discovery. ⁵²You would have wished to tell me something, or in your kindness you would have brought me out some comfort or other, and so an unnecessary risk would be run. ⁵³I brought Cartwright down with me—you remember the little chap at the express office—and he has seen after my simple wants: a loaf of bread and a clean collar. ⁵⁴What does man want more? ⁵⁵He has given me an extra pair of eyes upon a very active pair of feet, and both have been invaluable.”

⁵⁶“Then my reports have all been wasted!”—⁵⁷My voice trembled as I recalled the pains and the pride with which I had composed them.

⁵⁸Holmes took a bundle of papers from his pocket.

⁵⁹“Here are your reports, my dear fellow, and very well thumbed, I assure you. ⁶⁰I made excellent arrangements, and they are only delayed one day upon their way. ⁶¹I must compliment you exceedingly upon the zeal and the intelligence which you have shown over an extraordinarily difficult case.”

⁶²I was still rather raw over the deception which had been practised upon me, but the warmth of Holmes's praise drove my anger from my mind. ⁶³I felt also in my heart that he was right in what he said and that it was really best for our purpose that I should not have known that he was upon the moor.

⁶⁴“That's better,” said he, seeing the shadow rise from my face. ⁶⁵“And now tell me the result of your visit to Mrs. Laura Lyons—it was not difficult for me to guess that it was to see her that you had gone, for I am already aware that she is the one person in Coombe Tracey who might be of service to us in the matter. ⁶⁶In fact, if you had not gone to-day it is exceedingly probable that I should have gone to-morrow.”

⁶⁷The sun had set and dusk was settling over the moor. ⁶⁸The air had turned chill and we withdrew into the hut for warmth. ⁶⁹There, sitting together in the twilight, I told Holmes of my conversation with the lady. ⁷⁰So interested was he that I had to repeat some of it twice before he was satisfied.

⁷¹“This is most important,” said he when I had concluded. ⁷²“It fills up a gap which I had been unable to bridge, in this most complex affair. ⁷³You are aware, perhaps, that a close intimacy exists between this lady and the man Stapleton?”

⁷⁴“I did not know of a close intimacy.”

⁷⁵“There can be no doubt about the matter. ⁷⁶They meet, they write, there is a complete understanding between them. ⁷⁷Now, this puts a very powerful weapon into our hands. ⁷⁸If I could only use it to detach his wife—”

⁷⁹“His wife?”

⁸⁰“I am giving you some information now, in return for all that you have given me. ⁸¹The lady who has passed here as Miss Stapleton is in reality his wife.”

⁸²“Good heavens, Holmes! ⁸³Are you sure of what you say? ⁸⁴How could he have permitted Sir Henry to fall in love with her?”

⁸⁵“Sir Henry's falling in love could do no harm to anyone except Sir Henry. ⁸⁶He took particular care that Sir Henry did not make love to her, as you have yourself observed. ⁸⁷I repeat that the lady is his wife and not his sister.”

⁸⁸“But why this elaborate deception?”

⁸⁹“Because he foresaw that she would be very much more useful to him in the character of a free woman.”

⁹⁰All my unspoken instincts, my vague suspicions, suddenly took shape and centred upon the naturalist.

⁹¹In that impassive, colourless man, with his straw hat and his butterfly-net, I seemed to see something terrible—a creature of infinite patience and craft, with a smiling face and a murderous heart.

⁹²“It is he, then, who is our enemy—it is he who dogged us in London?”

⁹³“So I read the riddle.”

⁹⁴“And the warning—it must have come from her!”

⁹⁵“Exactly.”

⁹⁶The shape of some monstrous villainy, half seen, half guessed, loomed through the darkness which had girt me so long.

⁹⁷“But are you sure of this, Holmes? ⁹⁸How do you know that the woman is his wife?”

⁹⁹“Because he so far forgot himself as to tell you a true piece of autobiography upon the occasion when he first met you, and I dare say he has many a time regretted it since. ¹⁰⁰He was once a schoolmaster in the north of England. ¹⁰¹Now, there is no one more easy to trace than a schoolmaster. ¹⁰²There are scholastic agencies by which one may identify any man who has been in the profession. ¹⁰³A little investigation showed me that a school had come to grief under atrocious circumstances, and that the man who had owned it—the name was different—had disappeared with his wife. ¹⁰⁴The descriptions agreed. ¹⁰⁵When I learned that the missing man was devoted to entomology the identification was complete.”

¹⁰⁶The darkness was rising, but much was still hidden by the shadows.

¹⁰⁷“If this woman is in truth his wife, where does Mrs. Laura Lyons come in?” I asked.

¹⁰⁸“That is one of the points upon which your own researches have shed a light. ¹⁰⁹Your interview with the lady has cleared the situation very much. ¹¹⁰I did not know about a projected divorce between herself and her husband. ¹¹¹In that case, regarding Stapleton as an unmarried man, she counted no doubt upon becoming his wife.”

¹¹²“And when she is undeceived?”

¹¹³“Why, then we may find the lady of service. ¹¹⁴It must be our first duty to see her—both of us—tomorrow. ¹¹⁵Don't you think, Watson, that you are away from your charge rather long? ¹¹⁶Your place should be at Baskerville Hall.”

¹¹⁷The last red streaks had faded away in the west and night had settled upon the moor. ¹¹⁸A few faint stars were gleaming in a violet sky.

¹¹⁹“One last question, Holmes,” I said, as I rose. ¹²⁰“Surely there is no need of secrecy between you and me. ¹²¹What is the meaning of it all? ¹²²What is he after?”

¹²³Holmes's voice sank as he answered:—

¹²⁴“It is murder, Watson—refined, cold-blooded, deliberate murder. ¹²⁵Do not ask me for particulars. ¹²⁶My nets are closing upon him, even as his are upon Sir Henry, and with your help he is already almost at my mercy. ¹²⁷There is but one danger which can threaten us. ¹²⁸It is that he should strike before we are ready to do so. ¹²⁹Another day—two at the most—and I have my case complete, but until then guard your charge as closely as ever a fond mother watched her ailing child. ¹³⁰Your mission to-day has justified itself, and yet I could almost wish that you had not left his side. ¹³¹Hark!”

¹³²A terrible scream—a prolonged yell of horror and anguish—burst out of the silence of the moor. ¹³³That frightful cry turned the blood to ice in my veins.

¹³⁴“Oh, my God!” I gasped. ¹³⁵“What is it? ¹³⁶What does it mean?”

¹³⁷Holmes had sprung to his feet, and I saw his dark, athletic outline at the door of the hut, his shoulders stooping, his head thrust forward, his face peering into the darkness.

¹³⁸“Hush!” he whispered. ¹³⁹“Hush!”

¹⁴⁰The cry had been loud on account of its vehemence, but it had pealed out from somewhere far off on the shadowy plain. ¹⁴¹Now it burst upon our ears, nearer, louder, more urgent than before.

¹⁴²“Where is it?” Holmes whispered; and I knew from the thrill of his voice that he, the man of iron, was shaken to the soul. ¹⁴³“Where is it, Watson?”

¹⁴⁴“There, I think.” ¹⁴⁵I pointed into the darkness.

¹⁴⁶“No, there!”

¹⁴⁷Again the agonized cry swept through the silent night, louder and much nearer than ever. ¹⁴⁸And a new sound mingled with it, a deep, muttered rumble, musical and yet menacing, rising and falling like the low, constant murmur of the sea.

¹⁴⁹“The hound!” cried Holmes. ¹⁵⁰“Come, Watson, come! ¹⁵¹Great heavens, if we are too late!”

¹⁵²He had started running swiftly over the moor, and I had followed at his heels. ¹⁵³But now from somewhere among the broken ground immediately in front of us there came one last despairing yell, and then a dull, heavy thud. ¹⁵⁴We halted and listened. ¹⁵⁵Not another sound broke the heavy silence of the windless night.

¹⁵⁶I saw Holmes put his hand to his forehead like a man distracted. ¹⁵⁷He stamped his feet upon the ground.

¹⁵⁸“He has beaten us, Watson. ¹⁵⁹We are too late.”

¹⁶⁰“No, no, surely not!”

¹⁶¹“Fool that I was to hold my hand. ¹⁶²And you, Watson, see what comes of abandoning your charge!

¹⁶³But, by Heaven, if the worst has happened, we'll avenge him!”

¹⁶⁴Blindly we ran through the gloom, blundering against boulders, forcing our way through gorse bushes, panting up hills and rushing down slopes, heading always in the direction whence those dreadful sounds had come. ¹⁶⁵At every rise Holmes looked eagerly round him, but the shadows were thick upon the moor, and nothing moved upon its dreary face.

¹⁶⁶“Can you see anything?”

¹⁶⁷“Nothing.”

¹⁶⁸“But, hark, what is that?”

¹⁶⁹A low moan had fallen upon our ears. ¹⁷⁰There it was again upon our left! ¹⁷¹On that side a ridge of rocks ended in a sheer cliff which overlooked a stone-strewn slope. ¹⁷²On its jagged face was spread-eagled some dark, irregular object. ¹⁷³As we ran towards it the vague outline hardened into a definite shape. ¹⁷⁴It was a prostrate man face downward upon the ground, the head doubled under him at a horrible angle, the shoulders rounded and the body hunched together as if in the act of throwing a somersault. ¹⁷⁵So grotesque was the attitude that I could not for the instant realize that that moan had been the passing of his soul. ¹⁷⁶Not a whisper, not a rustle, rose now from the dark figure over which we stooped. ¹⁷⁷Holmes laid his hand upon him, and held it up again, with an exclamation of horror. ¹⁷⁸The gleam of the match which he struck shone upon his clotted fingers and upon the ghastly pool which widened slowly from the crushed skull of the victim. ¹⁷⁹And it shone upon something else which turned our hearts sick and faint within us—the body of Sir Henry Baskerville!

¹⁸⁰There was no chance of either of us forgetting that peculiar ruddy tweed suit—the very one which he had worn on the first morning that we had seen him in Baker Street. ¹⁸¹We caught the one clear glimpse of it, and then the match flickered and went out, even as the hope had gone out of our souls. ¹⁸²Holmes groaned, and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

¹⁸³“The brute! the brute!” I cried with clenched hands. ¹⁸⁴“Oh Holmes, I shall never forgive myself for having left him to his fate.”

¹⁸⁵“I am more to blame than you, Watson. ¹⁸⁶In order to have my case well rounded and complete, I have thrown away the life of my client. ¹⁸⁷It is the greatest blow which has befallen me in my career. ¹⁸⁸But how could I know—how could I know—that he would risk his life alone upon the moor in the face of all my warnings?”

¹⁸⁹“That we should have heard his screams—my God, those screams!—and yet have been unable to save him! ¹⁹⁰Where is this brute of a hound which drove him to his death? ¹⁹¹It may be lurking among these rocks at this instant. ¹⁹²And Stapleton, where is he? ¹⁹³He shall answer for this deed.”

¹⁹⁴“He shall. ¹⁹⁵I will see to that. ¹⁹⁶Uncle and nephew have been murdered—the one frightened to death by the very sight of a beast which he thought to be supernatural, the other driven to his end in his wild flight to escape from it. ¹⁹⁷But now we have to prove the connection between the man and the beast. ¹⁹⁸Save from what we heard, we cannot even swear to the existence of the latter, since Sir Henry has evidently died from the fall. ¹⁹⁹But, by heavens, cunning as he is, the fellow shall be in my power before another day is past!”

²⁰⁰We stood with bitter hearts on either side of the mangled body, overwhelmed by this sudden and irrevocable disaster which had brought all our long and weary labours to so piteous an end. ²⁰¹Then, as the moon rose we climbed to the top of the rocks over which our poor friend had fallen, and from the summit we gazed out over the shadowy moor, half silver and half gloom. ²⁰²Far away, miles off, in the direction of Grimpen, a single steady yellow light was shining. ²⁰³It could only come from the lonely abode of the Stapletons. ²⁰⁴With a bitter curse I shook my fist at it as I gazed.

²⁰⁵“Why should we not seize him at once?”

²⁰⁶“Our case is not complete. ²⁰⁷The fellow is wary and cunning to the last degree. ²⁰⁸It is not what we know, but what we can prove. ²⁰⁹If we make one false move the villain may escape us yet.”

²¹⁰“What can we do?”

²¹¹“There will be plenty for us to do to-morrow. ²¹²To-night we can only perform the last offices to our poor friend.”

²¹³Together we made our way down the precipitous slope and approached the body, black and clear against the silvered stones. ²¹⁴The agony of those contorted limbs struck me with a spasm of pain and blurred my eyes with tears.

²¹⁵“We must send for help, Holmes! ²¹⁶We cannot carry him all the way to the Hall. ²¹⁷Good heavens, are you mad?”

²¹⁸He had uttered a cry and bent over the body. ²¹⁹Now he was dancing and laughing and wringing my hand. ²²⁰Could this be my stern, self-contained friend? ²²¹These were hidden fires, indeed!

²²²“A beard! ²²³A beard! ²²⁴The man has a beard!”

²²⁵“A beard?”

²²⁶“It is not the baronet—it is—why, it is my neighbour, the convict!”

²²⁷With feverish haste we had turned the body over, and that dripping beard was pointing up to the cold, clear moon. ²²⁸There could be no doubt about the beetling forehead, the sunken animal eyes. ²²⁹It was indeed the same face which had glared upon me in the light of the candle from over the rock—the face of Selden, the criminal.

²³⁰Then in an instant it was all clear to me. ²³¹I remembered how the baronet had told me that he had handed his old wardrobe to Barrymore. ²³²Barrymore had passed it on in order to help Selden in his escape. ²³³Boots, shirt, cap—it was all Sir Henry's. ²³⁴The tragedy was still black enough, but this man had at least deserved death by the laws of his country. ²³⁵I told Holmes how the matter stood, my heart bubbling over with thankfulness and joy.

²³⁶“Then the clothes have been the poor devil's death,” said he. ²³⁷“It is clear enough that the hound has been laid on from some article of Sir Henry's—the boot which was abstracted in the hotel, in all probability—and so ran this man down. ²³⁸There is one very singular thing, however: ²³⁹How came Selden, in the darkness, to know that the hound was on his trail?”

²⁴⁰“He heard him.”

²⁴¹“To hear a hound upon the moor would not work a hard man like this convict into such a paroxysm of terror that he would risk recapture by screaming wildly for help. ²⁴²By his cries he must have run a long way after he knew the animal was on his track. ²⁴³How did he know?”

²⁴⁴“A greater mystery to me is why this hound, presuming that all our conjectures are correct—”

²⁴⁵“I presume nothing.”

²⁴⁶“Well, then, why this hound should be loose to-night. ²⁴⁷I suppose that it does not always run loose upon the moor. ²⁴⁸Stapleton would not let it go unless he had reason to think that Sir Henry would be there.”

²⁴⁹“My difficulty is the more formidable of the two, for I think that we shall very shortly get an explanation of yours, while mine may remain forever a mystery. ²⁵⁰The question now is, what shall we do with this poor wretch's body? ²⁵¹We cannot leave it here to the foxes and the ravens.”

²⁵²“I suggest that we put it in one of the huts until we can communicate with the police.”

²⁵³“Exactly. ²⁵⁴I have no doubt that you and I could carry it so far. ²⁵⁵Halloa, Watson, what's this? ²⁵⁶It's the man himself, by all that's wonderful and audacious! ²⁵⁷Not a word to show your suspicions—not a word, or my plans crumble to the ground.”

²⁵⁸A figure was approaching us over the moor, and I saw the dull red glow of a cigar. ²⁵⁹The moon shone upon him, and I could distinguish the dapper shape and jaunty walk of the naturalist. ²⁶⁰He stopped when he saw us, and then came on again.

²⁶¹“Why, Dr. Watson, that's not you, is it? ²⁶²You are the last man that I should have expected to see out on the moor at this time of night. ²⁶³But, dear me, what's this? ²⁶⁴Somebody hurt? ²⁶⁵Not—don't tell me that it is our friend Sir Henry!” ²⁶⁶He hurried past me and stooped over the dead man. ²⁶⁷I heard a sharp intake of his breath and the cigar fell from his fingers.

²⁶⁸“Who—who's this?” he stammered.

²⁶⁹“It is Selden, the man who escaped from Princetown.”

²⁷⁰Stapleton turned a ghastly face upon us, but by a supreme effort he had overcome his amazement and his disappointment. ²⁷¹He looked sharply from Holmes to me.

²⁷²“Dear me! ²⁷³What a very shocking affair! ²⁷⁴How did he die?”

²⁷⁵“He appears to have broken his neck by falling over these rocks. ²⁷⁶My friend and I were strolling on the moor when we heard a cry.”

²⁷⁷“I heard a cry also. ²⁷⁸That was what brought me out. ²⁷⁹I was uneasy about Sir Henry.”

²⁸⁰“Why about Sir Henry in particular?” I could not help asking.

²⁸¹“Because I had suggested that he should come over. ²⁸²When he did not come I was surprised, and I naturally became alarmed for his safety when I heard cries upon the moor. ²⁸³By the way”—his eyes darted again from my face to Holmes's—“did you hear anything else besides a cry?”

²⁸⁴“No,” said Holmes; “did you?”

²⁸⁵“No.”

²⁸⁶“What do you mean, then?”

²⁸⁷“Oh, you know the stories that the peasants tell about a phantom hound, and so on. ²⁸⁸It is said to be heard at night upon the moor. ²⁸⁹I was wondering if there were any evidence of such a sound to-night.”

²⁹⁰“We heard nothing of the kind,” said I.

²⁹¹“And what is your theory of this poor fellow's death?”

²⁹²“I have no doubt that anxiety and exposure have driven him off his head. ²⁹³He has rushed about the moor in a crazy state and eventually fallen over here and broken his neck.”

²⁹⁴“That seems the most reasonable theory,” said Stapleton, and he gave a sigh which I took to indicate his relief. ²⁹⁵“What do you think about it, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

²⁹⁶My friend bowed his compliments.

²⁹⁷“You are quick at identification,” said he.

²⁹⁸“We have been expecting you in these parts since Dr. Watson came down. ²⁹⁹You are in time to see a tragedy.”

³⁰⁰“Yes, indeed. ³⁰¹I have no doubt that my friend's explanation will cover the facts. ³⁰²I will take an unpleasant remembrance back to London with me to-morrow.”

³⁰³“Oh, you return to-morrow?”

³⁰⁴“That is my intention.”

³⁰⁵“I hope your visit has cast some light upon those occurrences which have puzzled us?”

³⁰⁶Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

³⁰⁷“One cannot always have the success for which one hopes. ³⁰⁸An investigator needs facts, and not legends or rumours. ³⁰⁹It has not been a satisfactory case.”

³¹⁰My friend spoke in his frankest and most unconcerned manner. ³¹¹Stapleton still looked hard at him.

³¹²Then he turned to me.

³¹³“I would suggest carrying this poor fellow to my house, but it would give my sister such a fright that I do not feel justified in doing it. ³¹⁴I think that if we put something over his face he will be safe until morning.”

³¹⁵And so it was arranged. ³¹⁶Resisting Stapleton's offer of hospitality, Holmes and I set off to Baskerville Hall, leaving the naturalist to return alone. ³¹⁷Looking back we saw the figure moving slowly away over the broad moor, and behind him that one black smudge on the silvered slope which showed where the man was lying who had come so horribly to his end.

Chapter XIII.

Fixing the Nets

¹“We're at close grips at last,” said Holmes as we walked together across the moor. ²“What a nerve the fellow has! ³How he pulled himself together in the face of what must have been a paralyzing shock when he found that the wrong man had fallen a victim to his plot. ⁴I told you in London, Watson, and I tell you now again, that we have never had a foeman more worthy of our steel.”

⁵“I am sorry that he has seen you.”

⁶“And so was I at first. ⁷But there was no getting out of it.”

⁸“What effect do you think it will have upon his plans now that he knows you are here?”

⁹“It may cause him to be more cautious, or it may drive him to desperate measures at once. ¹⁰Like most clever criminals, he may be too confident in his own cleverness and imagine that he has completely deceived us.”

¹¹“Why should we not arrest him at once?”

¹²“My dear Watson, you were born to be a man of action. ¹³Your instinct is always to do something energetic. ¹⁴But supposing, for argument's sake, that we had him arrested to-night, what on earth the better off should we be for that? ¹⁵We could prove nothing against him. ¹⁶There's the devilish cunning of it! ¹⁷If he were acting through a human agent we could get some evidence, but if we were to drag this great dog to the light of day it would not help us in putting a rope round the neck of its master.”

¹⁸“Surely we have a case.”

¹⁹“Not a shadow of one—only surmise and conjecture. ²⁰We should be laughed out of court if we came with such a story and such evidence.”

²¹“There is Sir Charles's death.”

²²“Found dead without a mark upon him. ²³You and I know that he died of sheer fright, and we know also what frightened him; but how are we to get twelve stolid jurymen to know it? ²⁴What signs are there of a hound? ²⁵Where are the marks of its fangs? ²⁶Of course we know that a hound does not bite a dead body and that Sir Charles was dead before ever the brute overtook him. ²⁷But we have to prove all this, and we are not in a position to do it.”

²⁸“Well, then, to-night?”

²⁹“We are not much better off to-night. ³⁰Again, there was no direct connection between the hound and the man's death. ³¹We never saw the hound. ³²We heard it; but we could not prove that it was running upon this man's trail. ³³There is a complete absence of motive. ³⁴No, my dear fellow; we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that we have no case at present, and that it is worth our while to run any risk in order to establish one.”

³⁵“And how do you propose to do so?”

³⁶“I have great hopes of what Mrs. Laura Lyons may do for us when the position of affairs is made clear to her. ³⁷And I have my own plan as well. ³⁸Sufficient for to-morrow is the evil thereof; but I hope before the day is past to have the upper hand at last.”

³⁹I could draw nothing further from him, and he walked, lost in thought, as far as the Baskerville gates.

⁴⁰“Are you coming up?”

⁴¹“Yes; I see no reason for further concealment. ⁴²But one last word, Watson. ⁴³Say nothing of the hound to Sir Henry. ⁴⁴Let him think that Selden's death was as Stapleton would have us believe. ⁴⁵He will have a better nerve for the ordeal which he will have to undergo to-morrow, when he is engaged, if I remember your report aright, to dine with these people.”

⁴⁶“And so am I.”

⁴⁷“Then you must excuse yourself and he must go alone. ⁴⁸That will be easily arranged. ⁴⁹And now, if we are too late for dinner, I think that we are both ready for our suppers.”

⁵⁰Sir Henry was more pleased than surprised to see Sherlock Holmes, for he had for some days been expecting that recent events would bring him down from London. ⁵¹He did raise his eyebrows, however, when he found that my friend had neither any luggage nor any explanations for its absence. ⁵²Between us we soon supplied his wants, and then over a belated supper we explained to the baronet as much of our experience as it seemed desirable that he should know. ⁵³But first I had the unpleasant duty of breaking the news to Barrymore and his wife. ⁵⁴To him it may have been an unmitigated relief, but she wept bitterly in her apron. ⁵⁵To all the world he was the man of violence, half animal and half demon; but to her he always remained the little wilful boy of her own girlhood, the child who had clung to her hand. ⁵⁶Evil indeed is the man who has not one woman to mourn him.

⁵⁷“I've been moping in the house all day since Watson went off in the morning,” said the baronet. ⁵⁸“I guess I should have some credit, for I have kept my promise. ⁵⁹If I hadn't sworn not to go about alone I might have had a more lively evening, for I had a message from Stapleton asking me over there.”

⁶⁰“I have no doubt that you would have had a more lively evening,” said Holmes drily. ⁶¹“By the way, I don't suppose you appreciate that we have been mourning over you as having broken your neck?”

⁶²Sir Henry opened his eyes. ⁶³“How was that?”

⁶⁴“This poor wretch was dressed in your clothes. ⁶⁵I fear your servant who gave them to him may get into trouble with the police.”

⁶⁶“That is unlikely. ⁶⁷There was no mark on any of them, as far as I know.”

⁶⁸“That's lucky for him—in fact, it's lucky for all of you, since you are all on the wrong side of the law in this matter. ⁶⁹I am not sure that as a conscientious detective my first duty is not to arrest the whole household. ⁷⁰Watson's reports are most incriminating documents.”

⁷¹“But how about the case?” asked the baronet. ⁷²“Have you made anything out of the tangle? ⁷³I don't know that Watson and I are much the wiser since we came down.”

⁷⁴“I think that I shall be in a position to make the situation rather more clear to you before long. ⁷⁵It has been an exceedingly difficult and most complicated business. ⁷⁶There are several points upon which we still want light—but it is coming all the same.”

⁷⁷“We've had one experience, as Watson has no doubt told you. ⁷⁸We heard the hound on the moor, so I can swear that it is not all empty superstition. ⁷⁹I had something to do with dogs when I was out West, and I know one when I hear one. ⁸⁰If you can muzzle that one and put him on a chain I'll be ready to swear you are the greatest detective of all time.”

⁸¹“I think I will muzzle him and chain him all right if you will give me your help.”

⁸²“Whatever you tell me to do I will do.”

⁸³“Very good; and I will ask you also to do it blindly, without always asking the reason.”

⁸⁴“Just as you like.”

⁸⁵“If you will do this I think the chances are that our little problem will soon be solved. ⁸⁶I have no doubt—”

⁸⁷He stopped suddenly and stared fixedly up over my head into the air. ⁸⁸The lamp beat upon his face, and so intent was it and so still that it might have been that of a clear-cut classical statue, a personification of alertness and expectation.

⁸⁹“What is it?” we both cried.

⁹⁰I could see as he looked down that he was repressing some internal emotion. ⁹¹His features were still composed, but his eyes shone with amused exultation.

⁹²“Excuse the admiration of a connoisseur,” said he as he waved his hand towards the line of portraits which covered the opposite wall. ⁹³“Watson won’t allow that I know anything of art, but that is mere jealousy, because our views upon the subject differ. ⁹⁴Now, these are a really very fine series of portraits.”

⁹⁵“Well, I’m glad to hear you say so,” said Sir Henry, glancing with some surprise at my friend. ⁹⁶“I don’t pretend to know much about these things, and I’d be a better judge of a horse or a steer than of a picture. ⁹⁷I didn’t know that you found time for such things.”

⁹⁸“I know what is good when I see it, and I see it now. ⁹⁹That’s a Kneller, I’ll swear, that lady in the blue silk over yonder, and the stout gentleman with the wig ought to be a Reynolds. ¹⁰⁰They are all family portraits, I presume?”

¹⁰¹“Every one.”

¹⁰²“Do you know the names?”

¹⁰³“Barrymore has been coaching me in them, and I think I can say my lessons fairly well.”

¹⁰⁴“Who is the gentleman with the telescope?”

¹⁰⁵“That is Rear-Admiral Baskerville, who served under Rodney in the West Indies. ¹⁰⁶The man with the blue coat and the roll of paper is Sir William Baskerville, who was Chairman of Committees of the House of Commons under Pitt.”

¹⁰⁷“And this Cavalier opposite to me—the one with the black velvet and the lace?”

¹⁰⁸“Ah, you have a right to know about him. ¹⁰⁹That is the cause of all the mischief, the wicked Hugo, who started the Hound of the Baskervilles. ¹¹⁰We’re not likely to forget him.”

¹¹¹I gazed with interest and some surprise upon the portrait.

¹¹²“Dear me!” said Holmes, “he seems a quiet, meek-mannered man enough, but I dare say that there was a lurking devil in his eyes. ¹¹³I had pictured him as a more robust and ruffianly person.”

¹¹⁴“There’s no doubt about the authenticity, for the name and the date, 1647, are on the back of the canvas.”

¹¹⁵Holmes said little more, but the picture of the old roysterer seemed to have a fascination for him, and his eyes were continually fixed upon it during supper. ¹¹⁶It was not until later, when Sir Henry had gone to his room, that I was able to follow the trend of his thoughts. ¹¹⁷He led me back into the banqueting-hall, his bedroom candle in his hand, and he held it up against the time-stained portrait on the wall.

¹¹⁸“Do you see anything there?”

¹¹⁹I looked at the broad plumed hat, the curling love-locks, the white lace collar, and the straight, severe face which was framed between them. ¹²⁰It was not a brutal countenance, but it was prim, hard, and stern, with a firm-set, thin-lipped mouth, and a coldly intolerant eye.

¹²¹“Is it like anyone you know?”

¹²²“There is something of Sir Henry about the jaw.”

¹²³“Just a suggestion, perhaps. ¹²⁴But wait an instant!” ¹²⁵He stood upon a chair, and, holding up the light in his left hand, he curved his right arm over the broad hat and round the long ringlets.

¹²⁶“Good heavens!” I cried, in amazement.

¹²⁷The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas.

¹²⁸“Ha, you see it now. ¹²⁹My eyes have been trained to examine faces and not their trimmings. ¹³⁰It is the first quality of a criminal investigator that he should see through a disguise.”

¹³¹“But this is marvellous. ¹³²It might be his portrait.”

¹³³“Yes, it is an interesting instance of a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual.

¹³⁴A study of family portraits is enough to convert a man to the doctrine of reincarnation. ¹³⁵The fellow is a Baskerville—that is evident.”

¹³⁶“With designs upon the succession.”

¹³⁷“Exactly. ¹³⁸This chance of the picture has supplied us with one of our most obvious missing links.

¹³⁹We have him, Watson, we have him, and I dare swear that before to-morrow night he will be fluttering in our net as helpless as one of his own butterflies. ¹⁴⁰A pin, a cork, and a card, and we add him to the Baker Street collection!” ¹⁴¹He burst into one of his rare fits of laughter as he turned away from the picture. ¹⁴²I have not heard him laugh often, and it has always boded ill to somebody.

¹⁴³I was up betimes in the morning, but Holmes was afoot earlier still, for I saw him as I dressed, coming up the drive.

¹⁴⁴“Yes, we should have a full day to-day,” he remarked, and he rubbed his hands with the joy of action.

¹⁴⁵“The nets are all in place, and the drag is about to begin. ¹⁴⁶We'll know before the day is out whether we have caught our big, lean-jawed pike, or whether he has got through the meshes.”

¹⁴⁷“Have you been on the moor already?”

¹⁴⁸“I have sent a report from Grimpen to Princetown as to the death of Selden. ¹⁴⁹I think I can promise that none of you will be troubled in the matter. ¹⁵⁰And I have also communicated with my faithful Cartwright, who would certainly have pined away at the door of my hut, as a dog does at his master's grave, if I had not set his mind at rest about my safety.”

¹⁵¹“What is the next move?”

¹⁵²“To see Sir Henry. ¹⁵³Ah, here he is!”

¹⁵⁴“Good morning, Holmes,” said the baronet. ¹⁵⁵“You look like a general who is planning a battle with his chief of the staff.”

¹⁵⁶“That is the exact situation. ¹⁵⁷Watson was asking for orders.”

¹⁵⁸“And so do I.”

¹⁵⁹“Very good. ¹⁶⁰You are engaged, as I understand, to dine with our friends the Stapletons to-night.”

¹⁶¹“I hope that you will come also. ¹⁶²They are very hospitable people, and I am sure that they would be very glad to see you.”

¹⁶³“I fear that Watson and I must go to London.”

¹⁶⁴“To London?”

¹⁶⁵“Yes, I think that we should be more useful there at the present juncture.”

¹⁶⁶The baronet's face perceptibly lengthened.

¹⁶⁷“I hoped that you were going to see me through this business. ¹⁶⁸The Hall and the moor are not very pleasant places when one is alone.”

¹⁶⁹“My dear fellow, you must trust me implicitly and do exactly what I tell you. ¹⁷⁰You can tell your friends that we should have been happy to have come with you, but that urgent business required us to be in town. ¹⁷¹We hope very soon to return to Devonshire. ¹⁷²Will you remember to give them that message?”

¹⁷³“If you insist upon it.”

¹⁷⁴“There is no alternative, I assure you.”

¹⁷⁵I saw by the baronet's clouded brow that he was deeply hurt by what he regarded as our desertion.

¹⁷⁶“When do you desire to go?” he asked coldly.

¹⁷⁷“Immediately after breakfast. ¹⁷⁸We will drive in to Coombe Tracey, but Watson will leave his things as a pledge that he will come back to you. ¹⁷⁹Watson, you will send a note to Stapleton to tell him that you regret that you cannot come.”

¹⁸⁰“I have a good mind to go to London with you,” said the baronet. ¹⁸¹“Why should I stay here alone?”

¹⁸²“Because it is your post of duty. ¹⁸³Because you gave me your word that you would do as you were told, and I tell you to stay.”

¹⁸⁴“All right, then, I'll stay.”

¹⁸⁵“One more direction! ¹⁸⁶I wish you to drive to Merripit House. ¹⁸⁷Send back your trap, however, and let them know that you intend to walk home.”

¹⁸⁸“To walk across the moor?”

¹⁸⁹“Yes.”

¹⁹⁰“But that is the very thing which you have so often cautioned me not to do.”

¹⁹¹“This time you may do it with safety. ¹⁹²If I had not every confidence in your nerve and courage I would not suggest it, but it is essential that you should do it.”

¹⁹³“Then I will do it.”

¹⁹⁴“And as you value your life do not go across the moor in any direction save along the straight path which leads from Merripit House to the Grimpen Road, and is your natural way home.”

¹⁹⁵“I will do just what you say.”

¹⁹⁶“Very good. ¹⁹⁷I should be glad to get away as soon after breakfast as possible, so as to reach London in the afternoon.”

¹⁹⁸I was much astounded by this programme, though I remembered that Holmes had said to Stapleton on the night before that his visit would terminate next day. ¹⁹⁹It had not crossed my mind, however, that he would wish me to go with him, nor could I understand how we could both be absent at a moment which he himself declared to be critical. ²⁰⁰There was nothing for it, however, but implicit obedience; so we bade good-bye to our rueful friend, and a couple of hours afterwards we were at the station of Coombe Tracey and had dispatched the trap upon its return journey. ²⁰¹A small boy was waiting upon the platform.

²⁰²“Any orders, sir?”

²⁰³“You will take this train to town, Cartwright. ²⁰⁴The moment you arrive you will send a wire to Sir Henry Baskerville, in my name, to say that if he finds the pocket-book which I have dropped he is to send it by registered post to Baker Street.”

²⁰⁵“Yes, sir.”

²⁰⁶“And ask at the station office if there is a message for me.”

²⁰⁷The boy returned with a telegram, which Holmes handed to me. ²⁰⁸It ran:

²⁰⁹Wire received. ²¹⁰Coming down with unsigned warrant. ²¹¹Arrive five-forty.

²¹²— Lestrade.

²¹³“That is in answer to mine of this morning. ²¹⁴He is the best of the professionals, I think, and we may need his assistance. ²¹⁵Now, Watson, I think that we cannot employ our time better than by calling upon your acquaintance, Mrs. Laura Lyons.”

²¹⁶His plan of campaign was beginning to be evident. ²¹⁷He would use the baronet in order to convince the Stapletons that we were really gone, while we should actually return at the instant when we were likely to be needed. ²¹⁸That telegram from London, if mentioned by Sir Henry to the Stapletons, must remove the last suspicions from their minds. ²¹⁹Already I seemed to see our nets drawing closer around that lean-jawed pike.

²²⁰Mrs. Laura Lyons was in her office, and Sherlock Holmes opened his interview with a frankness and directness which considerably amazed her.

²²¹“I am investigating the circumstances which attended the death of the late Sir Charles Baskerville,” said he. ²²²“My friend here, Dr. Watson, has informed me of what you have communicated, and also of what you have withheld in connection with that matter.”

²²³“What have I withheld?” she asked defiantly.

²²⁴“You have confessed that you asked Sir Charles to be at the gate at ten o'clock. ²²⁵We know that that was the place and hour of his death. ²²⁶You have withheld what the connection is between these events.”

²²⁷“There is no connection.”

²²⁸“In that case the coincidence must indeed be an extraordinary one. ²²⁹But I think that we shall succeed in establishing a connection after all. ²³⁰I wish to be perfectly frank with you, Mrs. Lyons. ²³¹We regard this case as one of murder, and the evidence may implicate not only your friend Mr. Stapleton, but his wife as well.”

²³²The lady sprang from her chair.

²³³“His wife!” she cried.

²³⁴“The fact is no longer a secret. ²³⁵The person who has passed for his sister is really his wife.”

²³⁶Mrs. Lyons had resumed her seat. ²³⁷Her hands were grasping the arms of her chair, and I saw that the pink nails had turned white with the pressure of her grip.

²³⁸“His wife!” she said again. ²³⁹“His wife! ²⁴⁰He is not a married man.”

²⁴¹Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

²⁴²“Prove it to me! ²⁴³Prove it to me! ²⁴⁴And if you can do so—!” ²⁴⁵The fierce flash of her eyes said more than any words.

²⁴⁶“I have come prepared to do so,” said Holmes, drawing several papers from his pocket. ²⁴⁷“Here is a photograph of the couple taken in York four years ago. ²⁴⁸It is indorsed ‘Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur,’ but you will have no difficulty in recognizing him, and her also, if you know her by sight. ²⁴⁹Here are three written descriptions by trustworthy witnesses of Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur, who at that time kept St. Oliver’s private school. ²⁵⁰Read them and see if you can doubt the identity of these people.”

²⁵¹She glanced at them, and then looked up at us with the set, rigid face of a desperate woman.

²⁵²“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “this man had offered me marriage on condition that I could get a divorce from my husband. ²⁵³He has lied to me, the villain, in every conceivable way. ²⁵⁴Not one word of truth has he ever told me. ²⁵⁵And why—why? ²⁵⁶I imagined that all was for my own sake. ²⁵⁷But now I see that I was never anything but a tool in his hands. ²⁵⁸Why should I preserve faith with him who never kept any with me? ²⁵⁹Why should I try to shield him from the consequences of his own wicked acts? ²⁶⁰Ask me what you like, and there is nothing which I shall hold back. ²⁶¹One thing I swear to you, and that is that when I wrote the letter I never dreamed of any harm to the old gentleman, who had been my kindest friend.”

²⁶²“I entirely believe you, madam,” said Sherlock Holmes. ²⁶³“The recital of these events must be very painful to you, and perhaps it will make it easier if I tell you what occurred, and you can check me if I make any material mistake. ²⁶⁴The sending of this letter was suggested to you by Stapleton?”

²⁶⁵“He dictated it.”

²⁶⁶“I presume that the reason he gave was that you would receive help from Sir Charles for the legal expenses connected with your divorce?”

²⁶⁷“Exactly.”

²⁶⁸“And then after you had sent the letter he dissuaded you from keeping the appointment?”

²⁶⁹“He told me that it would hurt his self-respect that any other man should find the money for such an object, and that though he was a poor man himself he would devote his last penny to removing the obstacles which divided us.”

²⁷⁰“He appears to be a very consistent character. ²⁷¹And then you heard nothing until you read the reports of the death in the paper?”

²⁷²“No.”

²⁷³“And he made you swear to say nothing about your appointment with Sir Charles?”

²⁷⁴“He did. ²⁷⁵He said that the death was a very mysterious one, and that I should certainly be suspected if the facts came out. ²⁷⁶He frightened me into remaining silent.”

²⁷⁷“Quite so. ²⁷⁸But you had your suspicions?”

²⁷⁹She hesitated and looked down.

²⁸⁰“I knew him,” she said. ²⁸¹“But if he had kept faith with me I should always have done so with him.”

²⁸²“I think that on the whole you have had a fortunate escape,” said Sherlock Holmes. ²⁸³“You have had him in your power and he knew it, and yet you are alive. ²⁸⁴You have been walking for some months very near to the edge of a precipice. ²⁸⁵We must wish you good-morning now, Mrs. Lyons, and it is probable that you will very shortly hear from us again.”

²⁸⁶“Our case becomes rounded off, and difficulty after difficulty thins away in front of us,” said Holmes as we stood waiting for the arrival of the express from town. ²⁸⁷“I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times. ²⁸⁸Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Godno, in Little Russia, in the year '66, and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own. ²⁸⁹Even now we have no clear case against this very wily man. ²⁹⁰But I shall be very much surprised if it is not clear enough before we go to bed this night.”

²⁹¹The London express came roaring into the station, and a small, wiry bulldog of a man had sprung from a first-class carriage. ²⁹²We all three shook hands, and I saw at once from the reverential way in which Lestrade gazed at my companion that he had learned a good deal since the days when they had first worked together. ²⁹³I could well remember the scorn which the theories of the reasoner used then to excite in the practical man.

²⁹⁴“Anything good?” he asked.

²⁹⁵“The biggest thing for years,” said Holmes. ²⁹⁶“We have two hours before we need think of starting. ²⁹⁷I think we might employ it in getting some dinner and then, Lestrade, we will take the London fog out of your throat by giving you a breath of the pure night air of Dartmoor. ²⁹⁸Never been there? ²⁹⁹Ah, well, I don't suppose you will forget your first visit.”

Chapter XIV.

The Hound of the Baskervilles

¹One of Sherlock Holmes's defects—if, indeed, one may call it a defect—was that he was exceedingly loath to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfilment. ²Partly it came no doubt from his own masterful nature, which loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him. ³Partly also from his professional caution, which urged him never to take any chances. ⁴The result, however, was very trying for those who were acting as his agents and assistants. ⁵I had often suffered under it, but never more so than during that long drive in the darkness. ⁶The great ordeal was in front of us; at last we were about to make our final effort, and yet Holmes had said nothing, and I could only surmise what his course of action would be. ⁷My nerves thrilled with anticipation when at last the cold wind upon our faces and the dark, void spaces on either side of the narrow road told me that we were back upon the moor once again. ⁸Every stride of the horses and every turn of the wheels was taking us nearer to our supreme adventure.

⁹Our conversation was hampered by the presence of the driver of the hired wagonette, so that we were forced to talk of trivial matters when our nerves were tense with emotion and anticipation. ¹⁰It was a relief to me, after that unnatural restraint, when we at last passed Frankland's house and knew that we were drawing near to the Hall and to the scene of action. ¹¹We did not drive up to the door but got down near the gate of the avenue. ¹²The wagonette was paid off and ordered to return to Coombe Tracey forthwith, while we started to walk to Merripit House.

¹³“Are you armed, Lestrade?”

¹⁴The little detective smiled.

¹⁵“As long as I have my trousers I have a hip-pocket, and as long as I have my hip-pocket I have something in it.”

¹⁶“Good! ¹⁷My friend and I are also ready for emergencies.”

¹⁸“You're mighty close about this affair, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁹What's the game now?”

²⁰“A waiting game.”

²¹“My word, it does not seem a very cheerful place,” said the detective with a shiver, glancing round him at the gloomy slopes of the hill and at the huge lake of fog which lay over the Grimpen Mire. ²²“I see the lights of a house ahead of us.”

²³“That is Merripit House and the end of our journey. ²⁴I must request you to walk on tiptoe and not to talk above a whisper.”

²⁵We moved cautiously along the track as if we were bound for the house, but Holmes halted us when we were about two hundred yards from it.

²⁶“This will do,” said he. ²⁷“These rocks upon the right make an admirable screen.”

²⁸“We are to wait here?”

²⁹“Yes, we shall make our little ambush here. ³⁰Get into this hollow, Lestrade. ³¹You have been inside the house, have you not, Watson? ³²Can you tell the position of the rooms? ³³What are those latticed windows at this end?”

³⁴“I think they are the kitchen windows.”

³⁵“And the one beyond, which shines so brightly?”

³⁶“That is certainly the dining-room.”

³⁷“The blinds are up. ³⁸You know the lie of the land best. ³⁹Creep forward quietly and see what they are doing—but for heaven's sake don't let them know that they are watched!”

⁴⁰I tiptoed down the path and stooped behind the low wall which surrounded the stunted orchard.

⁴¹Creeping in its shadow I reached a point whence I could look straight through the uncurtained window.

⁴²There were only two men in the room, Sir Henry and Stapleton. ⁴³They sat with their profiles towards me on either side of the round table. ⁴⁴Both of them were smoking cigars, and coffee and wine were in front of them. ⁴⁵Stapleton was talking with animation, but the baronet looked pale and distrait. ⁴⁶Perhaps the thought of that lonely walk across the ill-omened moor was weighing heavily upon his mind.

⁴⁷As I watched them Stapleton rose and left the room, while Sir Henry filled his glass again and leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigar. ⁴⁸I heard the creak of a door and the crisp sound of boots upon gravel. ⁴⁹The steps passed along the path on the other side of the wall under which I crouched. ⁵⁰Looking over, I saw the naturalist pause at the door of an out-house in the corner of the orchard. ⁵¹A key turned in a lock, and as he passed in there was a curious scuffling noise from within. ⁵²He was only a minute or so inside, and then I heard the key turn once more and he passed me and re-entered the house. ⁵³I saw him rejoin his guest, and I crept quietly back to where my companions were waiting to tell them what I had seen.

⁵⁴“You say, Watson, that the lady is not there?” Holmes asked, when I had finished my report.

⁵⁵“No.”

⁵⁶“Where can she be, then, since there is no light in any other room except the kitchen?”

⁵⁷“I cannot think where she is.”

⁵⁸I have said that over the great Grimpen Mire there hung a dense, white fog. ⁵⁹It was drifting slowly in our direction, and banked itself up like a wall on that side of us, low, but thick and well defined. ⁶⁰The moon shone on it, and it looked like a great shimmering ice-field, with the heads of the distant tors as rocks borne upon its surface. ⁶¹Holmes's face was turned towards it, and he muttered impatiently as he watched its sluggish drift.

⁶²“It's moving towards us, Watson.”

⁶³“Is that serious?”

⁶⁴“Very serious, indeed—the one thing upon earth which could have disarranged my plans. ⁶⁵He can't be very long, now. ⁶⁶It is already ten o'clock. ⁶⁷Our success and even his life may depend upon his coming out before the fog is over the path.”

⁶⁸The night was clear and fine above us. ⁶⁹The stars shone cold and bright, while a half-moon bathed the whole scene in a soft, uncertain light. ⁷⁰Before us lay the dark bulk of the house, its serrated roof and bristling chimneys hard outlined against the silver-spangled sky. ⁷¹Broad bars of golden light from the lower windows stretched across the orchard and the moor. ⁷²One of them was suddenly shut off. ⁷³The servants had left the kitchen. ⁷⁴There only remained the lamp in the dining-room where the two men, the murderous host and the unconscious guest, still chatted over their cigars.

⁷⁵Every minute that white woolly plain which covered one half of the moor was drifting closer and closer to the house. ⁷⁶Already the first thin wisps of it were curling across the golden square of the lighted window. ⁷⁷The farther wall of the orchard was already invisible, and the trees were standing out of a swirl of white vapour. ⁷⁸As we watched it the fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners of the

house and rolled slowly into one dense bank, on which the upper floor and the roof floated like a strange ship upon a shadowy sea. ⁷⁹Holmes struck his hand passionately upon the rock in front of us and stamped his feet in his impatience.

⁸⁰“If he isn't out in a quarter of an hour the path will be covered. ⁸¹In half an hour we won't be able to see our hands in front of us.”

⁸²“Shall we move farther back upon higher ground?”

⁸³“Yes, I think it would be as well.”

⁸⁴So as the fog-bank flowed onward we fell back before it until we were half a mile from the house, and still that dense white sea, with the moon silvering its upper edge, swept slowly and inexorably on.

⁸⁵“We are going too far,” said Holmes. ⁸⁶“We dare not take the chance of his being overtaken before he can reach us. ⁸⁷At all costs we must hold our ground where we are.” ⁸⁸He dropped on his knees and clapped his ear to the ground. ⁸⁹“Thank God, I think that I hear him coming.”

⁹⁰A sound of quick steps broke the silence of the moor. ⁹¹Crouching among the stones we stared intently at the silver-tipped bank in front of us. ⁹²The steps grew louder, and through the fog, as through a curtain, there stepped the man whom we were awaiting. ⁹³He looked round him in surprise as he emerged into the clear, starlit night. ⁹⁴Then he came swiftly along the path, passed close to where we lay, and went on up the long slope behind us. ⁹⁵As he walked he glanced continually over either shoulder, like a man who is ill at ease.

⁹⁶“Hist!” cried Holmes, and I heard the sharp click of a cocking pistol. ⁹⁷“Look out! ⁹⁸It's coming!”

⁹⁹There was a thin, crisp, continuous patter from somewhere in the heart of that crawling bank. ¹⁰⁰The cloud was within fifty yards of where we lay, and we glared at it, all three, uncertain what horror was about to break from the heart of it. ¹⁰¹I was at Holmes's elbow, and I glanced for an instant at his face. ¹⁰²It was pale and exultant, his eyes shining brightly in the moonlight. ¹⁰³But suddenly they started forward in a rigid, fixed stare, and his lips parted in amazement. ¹⁰⁴At the same instant Lestrade gave a yell of terror and threw himself face downward upon the ground. ¹⁰⁵I sprang to my feet, my inert hand grasping my pistol, my mind paralyzed by the dreadful shape which had sprung out upon us from the shadows of the fog. ¹⁰⁶A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. ¹⁰⁷Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. ¹⁰⁸Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

¹⁰⁹With long bounds the huge black creature was leaping down the track, following hard upon the footsteps of our friend. ¹¹⁰So paralyzed were we by the apparition that we allowed him to pass before we had recovered our nerve. ¹¹¹Then Holmes and I both fired together, and the creature gave a hideous howl, which showed that one at least had hit him. ¹¹²He did not pause, however, but bounded onward. ¹¹³Far away on the path we saw Sir Henry looking back, his face white in the moonlight, his hands raised in horror, glaring helplessly at the frightful thing which was hunting him down.

¹¹⁴But that cry of pain from the hound had blown all our fears to the winds. ¹¹⁵If he was vulnerable he was mortal, and if we could wound him we could kill him. ¹¹⁶Never have I seen a man run as Holmes ran that night. ¹¹⁷I am reckoned fleet of foot, but he outpaced me as much as I outpaced the little professional. ¹¹⁸In front of us as we flew up the track we heard scream after scream from Sir Henry and the deep roar of the hound. ¹¹⁹I was in time to see the beast spring upon its victim, hurl him to the ground, and worry at his throat. ¹²⁰But the next instant Holmes had emptied five barrels of his revolver into the creature's flank. ¹²¹With a last howl of agony and a vicious snap in the air, it rolled upon its back, four feet pawing furiously, and then fell limp upon its side. ¹²²I stooped, panting, and pressed my

pistol to the dreadful, shimmering head, but it was useless to press the trigger. ¹²³The giant hound was dead.

¹²⁴Sir Henry lay insensible where he had fallen. ¹²⁵We tore away his collar, and Holmes breathed a prayer of gratitude when we saw that there was no sign of a wound and that the rescue had been in time.

¹²⁶Already our friend's eyelids shivered and he made a feeble effort to move. ¹²⁷Lestrade thrust his brandy-flask between the baronet's teeth, and two frightened eyes were looking up at us.

¹²⁸"My God!" he whispered. ¹²⁹"What was it?" ¹³⁰What, in heaven's name, was it?"

¹³¹"It's dead, whatever it is," said Holmes. ¹³²"We've laid the family ghost once and forever."

¹³³In mere size and strength it was a terrible creature which was lying stretched before us. ¹³⁴It was not a pure bloodhound and it was not a pure mastiff; but it appeared to be a combination of the two—gaunt, savage, and as large as a small lioness. ¹³⁵Even now, in the stillness of death, the huge jaws seemed to be dripping with a bluish flame and the small, deep-set, cruel eyes were ringed with fire. ¹³⁶I placed my hand upon the glowing muzzle, and as I held them up my own fingers smouldered and gleamed in the darkness.

¹³⁷"Phosphorus," I said.

¹³⁸"A cunning preparation of it," said Holmes, sniffing at the dead animal. ¹³⁹"There is no smell which might have interfered with his power of scent. ¹⁴⁰We owe you a deep apology, Sir Henry, for having exposed you to this fright. ¹⁴¹I was prepared for a hound, but not for such a creature as this. ¹⁴²And the fog gave us little time to receive him."

¹⁴³"You have saved my life."

¹⁴⁴"Having first endangered it. ¹⁴⁵Are you strong enough to stand?"

¹⁴⁶"Give me another mouthful of that brandy and I shall be ready for anything. ¹⁴⁷So! ¹⁴⁸Now, if you will help me up. ¹⁴⁹What do you propose to do?"

¹⁵⁰"To leave you here. ¹⁵¹You are not fit for further adventures to-night. ¹⁵²If you will wait, one or other of us will go back with you to the Hall."

¹⁵³He tried to stagger to his feet; but he was still ghastly pale and trembling in every limb. ¹⁵⁴We helped him to a rock, where he sat shivering with his face buried in his hands.

¹⁵⁵"We must leave you now," said Holmes. ¹⁵⁶"The rest of our work must be done, and every moment is of importance. ¹⁵⁷We have our case, and now we only want our man.

¹⁵⁸"It's a thousand to one against our finding him at the house," he continued as we retraced our steps swiftly down the path. ¹⁵⁹"Those shots must have told him that the game was up."

¹⁶⁰"We were some distance off, and this fog may have deadened them."

¹⁶¹"He followed the hound to call him off—of that you may be certain. ¹⁶²No, no, he's gone by this time! ¹⁶³But we'll search the house and make sure."

¹⁶⁴The front door was open, so we rushed in and hurried from room to room to the amazement of a doddering old manservant, who met us in the passage. ¹⁶⁵There was no light save in the dining-room, but Holmes caught up the lamp and left no corner of the house unexplored. ¹⁶⁶No sign could we see of the man whom we were chasing. ¹⁶⁷On the upper floor, however, one of the bedroom doors was locked.

¹⁶⁸"There's someone in here," cried Lestrade. ¹⁶⁹"I can hear a movement. ¹⁷⁰Open this door!"

¹⁷¹A faint moaning and rustling came from within. ¹⁷²Holmes struck the door just over the lock with the flat of his foot and it flew open. ¹⁷³Pistol in hand, we all three rushed into the room.

¹⁷⁴But there was no sign within it of that desperate and defiant villain whom we expected to see.

¹⁷⁵Instead we were faced by an object so strange and so unexpected that we stood for a moment staring at it in amazement.

¹⁷⁶The room had been fashioned into a small museum, and the walls were lined by a number of glass-topped cases full of that collection of butterflies and moths the formation of which had been the relaxation of this complex and dangerous man. ¹⁷⁷In the centre of this room there was an upright beam, which had been placed at some period as a support for the old worm-eaten baulk of timber which spanned the roof. ¹⁷⁸To this post a figure was tied, so swathed and muffled in the sheets which had been used to secure it that one could not for the moment tell whether it was that of a man or a woman. ¹⁷⁹One towel passed round the throat and was secured at the back of the pillar. ¹⁸⁰Another covered the lower part of the face, and over it two dark eyes—eyes full of grief and shame and a dreadful questioning—stared back at us. ¹⁸¹In a minute we had torn off the gag, unswathed the bonds, and Mrs. Stapleton sank upon the floor in front of us. ¹⁸²As her beautiful head fell upon her chest I saw the clear red weal of a whiplash across her neck.

¹⁸³“The brute!” cried Holmes. ¹⁸⁴“Here, Lestrade, your brandy-bottle! ¹⁸⁵Put her in the chair! ¹⁸⁶She has fainted from ill-usage and exhaustion.”

¹⁸⁷She opened her eyes again.

¹⁸⁸“Is he safe?” she asked. ¹⁸⁹“Has he escaped?”

¹⁹⁰“He cannot escape us, madam.”

¹⁹¹“No, no, I did not mean my husband. ¹⁹²Sir Henry? ¹⁹³Is he safe?”

¹⁹⁴“Yes.”

¹⁹⁵“And the hound?”

¹⁹⁶“It is dead.”

¹⁹⁷She gave a long sigh of satisfaction.

¹⁹⁸“Thank God! ¹⁹⁹Thank God! ²⁰⁰Oh, this villain! ²⁰¹See how he has treated me!” ²⁰²She shot her arms out from her sleeves, and we saw with horror that they were all mottled with bruises. ²⁰³“But this is nothing—nothing! ²⁰⁴It is my mind and soul that he has tortured and defiled. ²⁰⁵I could endure it all, ill-usage, solitude, a life of deception, everything, as long as I could still cling to the hope that I had his love, but now I know that in this also I have been his dupe and his tool.” ²⁰⁶She broke into passionate sobbing as she spoke.

²⁰⁷“You bear him no good will, madam,” said Holmes. ²⁰⁸“Tell us then where we shall find him. ²⁰⁹If you have ever aided him in evil, help us now and so atone.”

²¹⁰“There is but one place where he can have fled,” she answered. ²¹¹“There is an old tin mine on an island in the heart of the mire. ²¹³It was there that he kept his hound and there also he had made preparations so that he might have a refuge. ²¹⁴That is where he would fly.”

²¹⁵The fog-bank lay like white wool against the window. ²¹⁶Holmes held the lamp towards it.

²¹⁷“See,” said he. ²¹⁸“No one could find his way into the Grimpen Mire to-night.”

²¹⁹She laughed and clapped her hands. ²²⁰Her eyes and teeth gleamed with fierce merriment.

²²¹“He may find his way in, but never out,” she cried. ²²²“How can he see the guiding wands to-night?”
²²³We planted them together, he and I, to mark the pathway through the mire. ²²⁴Oh, if I could only have plucked them out to-day. ²²⁵Then indeed you would have had him at your mercy!”

²²⁶It was evident to us that all pursuit was in vain until the fog had lifted. ²²⁷Meanwhile we left Lestrade in possession of the house while Holmes and I went back with the baronet to Baskerville Hall. ²²⁸The story of the Stapletons could no longer be withheld from him, but he took the blow bravely when he learned the truth about the woman whom he had loved. ²²⁹But the shock of the night's adventures had shattered his nerves, and before morning he lay delirious in a high fever, under the care of Dr. Mortimer. ²³⁰The two of them were destined to travel together round the world before Sir Henry had become once more the hale, hearty man that he had been before he became master of that ill-omened estate.

²³¹And now I come rapidly to the conclusion of this singular narrative, in which I have tried to make the reader share those dark fears and vague surmises which clouded our lives so long and ended in so tragic a manner. ²³²On the morning after the death of the hound the fog had lifted and we were guided by Mrs. Stapleton to the point where they had found a pathway through the bog. ²³³It helped us to realize the horror of this woman's life when we saw the eagerness and joy with which she laid us on her husband's track. ²³⁴We left her standing upon the thin peninsula of firm, peaty soil which tapered out into the widespread bog. ²³⁵From the end of it a small wand planted here and there showed where the path zigzagged from tuft to tuft of rushes among those green-scummed pits and foul quagmires which barred the way to the stranger. ²³⁶Rank reeds and lush, slimy water-plants sent an odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour onto our faces, while a false step plunged us more than once thigh-deep into the dark, quivering mire, which shook for yards in soft undulations around our feet. ²³⁷Its tenacious grip plucked at our heels as we walked, and when we sank into it it was as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us. ²³⁸Once only we saw a trace that someone had passed that perilous way before us. ²³⁹From amid a tuft of cotton grass which bore it up out of the slime some dark thing was projecting. ²⁴⁰Holmes sank to his waist as he stepped from the path to seize it, and had we not been there to drag him out he could never have set his foot upon firm land again. ²⁴¹He held an old black boot in the air. ²⁴²“Meyers, Toronto,” was printed on the leather inside.

²⁴³“It is worth a mud bath,” said he. ²⁴⁴“It is our friend Sir Henry's missing boot.”

²⁴⁵“Thrown there by Stapleton in his flight.”

²⁴⁶“Exactly. ²⁴⁷He retained it in his hand after using it to set the hound upon the track. ²⁴⁸He fled when he knew the game was up, still clutching it. ²⁴⁹And he hurled it away at this point of his flight. ²⁵⁰We know at least that he came so far in safety.”

²⁵¹But more than that we were never destined to know, though there was much which we might surmise. ²⁵²There was no chance of finding footsteps in the mire, for the rising mud oozed swiftly in upon them, but as we at last reached firmer ground beyond the morass we all looked eagerly for them. ²⁵³But no slightest sign of them ever met our eyes. ²⁵⁴If the earth told a true story, then Stapleton never reached that island of refuge towards which he struggled through the fog upon that last night. ²⁵⁵Somewhere in the heart of the great Grimpen Mire, down in the foul slime of the huge morass which had sucked him in, this cold and cruel-hearted man is forever buried.

²⁵⁶Many traces we found of him in the bog-girt island where he had hid his savage ally. ²⁵⁷A huge driving-wheel and a shaft half-filled with rubbish showed the position of an abandoned mine. ²⁵⁸Beside it were the crumbling remains of the cottages of the miners, driven away no doubt by the foul reek of the surrounding swamp. ²⁵⁹In one of these a staple and chain with a quantity of gnawed bones showed where the animal had been confined. ²⁶⁰A skeleton with a tangle of brown hair adhering to it lay among the debris.

²⁶¹“A dog!” said Holmes. ²⁶²“By Jove, a curly-haired spaniel. ²⁶³Poor Mortimer will never see his pet again. ²⁶⁴Well, I do not know that this place contains any secret which we have not already fathomed. ²⁶⁵He could hide his hound, but he could not hush its voice, and hence came those cries which even in daylight were not pleasant to hear. ²⁶⁶On an emergency he could keep the hound in the out-house at Merripit, but it was always a risk, and it was only on the supreme day, which he regarded as the end of all his efforts, that he dared do it. ²⁶⁷This paste in the tin is no doubt the luminous mixture with which the creature was daubed. ²⁶⁸It was suggested, of course, by the story of the family hell-hound, and by the desire to frighten old Sir Charles to death. ²⁶⁹No wonder the poor devil of a convict ran and screamed, even as our friend did, and as we ourselves might have done, when he saw such a creature bounding through the darkness of the moor upon his track. ²⁷⁰It was a cunning device, for, apart from the chance of driving your victim to his death, what peasant would venture to inquire too closely into such a creature should he get sight of it, as many have done, upon the moor? ²⁷¹I said it in London, Watson, and I say it again now, that never yet have we helped to hunt down a more dangerous man than he who is lying yonder”—he swept his long arm towards the huge mottled expanse of green-splotched bog which stretched away until it merged into the russet slopes of the moor.

Chapter XV.

A Retrospection

¹It was the end of November and Holmes and I sat, upon a raw and foggy night, on either side of a blazing fire in our sitting-room in Baker Street. ²Since the tragic upshot of our visit to Devonshire he had been engaged in two affairs of the utmost importance, in the first of which he had exposed the atrocious conduct of Colonel Upwood in connection with the famous card scandal of the Nonpareil Club, while in the second he had defended the unfortunate Mme. Montpensier from the charge of murder which hung over her in connection with the death of her step-daughter, Mlle. Carere, the young lady who, as it will be remembered, was found six months later alive and married in New York. ³My friend was in excellent spirits over the success which had attended a succession of difficult and important cases, so that I was able to induce him to discuss the details of the Baskerville mystery. ⁴I had waited patiently for the opportunity, for I was aware that he would never permit cases to overlap, and that his clear and logical mind would not be drawn from its present work to dwell upon memories of the past. ⁵Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer were, however, in London, on their way to that long voyage which had been recommended for the restoration of his shattered nerves. ⁶They had called upon us that very afternoon, so that it was natural that the subject should come up for discussion.

⁷"The whole course of events," said Holmes, "from the point of view of the man who called himself Stapleton was simple and direct, although to us, who had no means in the beginning of knowing the motives of his actions and could only learn part of the facts, it all appeared exceedingly complex. ⁸I have had the advantage of two conversations with Mrs. Stapleton, and the case has now been so entirely cleared up that I am not aware that there is anything which has remained a secret to us. ⁹You will find a few notes upon the matter under the heading B in my indexed list of cases."

¹⁰"Perhaps you would kindly give me a sketch of the course of events from memory."

¹¹"Certainly, though I cannot guarantee that I carry all the facts in my mind. ¹²Intense mental concentration has a curious way of blotting out what has passed. ¹³The barrister who has his case at his fingers' ends, and is able to argue with an expert upon his own subject finds that a week or two of the courts will drive it all out of his head once more. ¹⁴So each of my cases displaces the last, and Mlle. Carere has blurred my recollection of Baskerville Hall. ¹⁵To-morrow some other little problem may be submitted to my notice which will in turn dispossess the fair French lady and the infamous Upwood. ¹⁶So far as the case of the Hound goes, however, I will give you the course of events as nearly as I can, and you will suggest anything which I may have forgotten.

¹⁷"My inquiries show beyond all question that the family portrait did not lie, and that this fellow was indeed a Baskerville. ¹⁸He was a son of that Rodger Baskerville, the younger brother of Sir Charles, who fled with a sinister reputation to South America, where he was said to have died unmarried. ¹⁹He did, as a matter of fact, marry, and had one child, this fellow, whose real name is the same as his father's. ²⁰He married Beryl Garcia, one of the beauties of Costa Rica, and, having purloined a considerable sum of public money, he changed his name to Vandeleur and fled to England, where he established a school in the east of Yorkshire. ²¹His reason for attempting this special line of business was that he had struck up an acquaintance with a consumptive tutor upon the voyage home, and that he had used this man's ability to make the undertaking a success. ²²Fraser, the tutor, died however, and the school which had begun well sank from disrepute into infamy. ²³The Vandeleurs found it convenient to change their name to Stapleton, and he brought the remains of his fortune, his schemes for the future, and his taste for entomology to the south of England. ²⁴I learned at the British Museum that he was a recognized authority upon the subject, and that the name of Vandeleur has been permanently attached to a certain moth which he had, in his Yorkshire days, been the first to describe.

²⁵“We now come to that portion of his life which has proved to be of such intense interest to us. ²⁶The fellow had evidently made inquiry and found that only two lives intervened between him and a valuable estate. ²⁷When he went to Devonshire his plans were, I believe, exceedingly hazy, but that he meant mischief from the first is evident from the way in which he took his wife with him in the character of his sister. ²⁸The idea of using her as a decoy was clearly already in his mind, though he may not have been certain how the details of his plot were to be arranged. ²⁹He meant in the end to have the estate, and he was ready to use any tool or run any risk for that end. ³⁰His first act was to establish himself as near to his ancestral home as he could, and his second was to cultivate a friendship with Sir Charles Baskerville and with the neighbours.

³¹“The baronet himself told him about the family hound, and so prepared the way for his own death. ³²Stapleton, as I will continue to call him, knew that the old man's heart was weak and that a shock would kill him. ³³So much he had learned from Dr. Mortimer. ³⁴He had heard also that Sir Charles was superstitious and had taken this grim legend very seriously. ³⁵His ingenious mind instantly suggested a way by which the baronet could be done to death, and yet it would be hardly possible to bring home the guilt to the real murderer.

³⁶“Having conceived the idea he proceeded to carry it out with considerable finesse. ³⁷An ordinary schemer would have been content to work with a savage hound. ³⁸The use of artificial means to make the creature diabolical was a flash of genius upon his part. ³⁹The dog he bought in London from Ross and Mangles, the dealers in Fulham Road. ⁴⁰It was the strongest and most savage in their possession. ⁴¹He brought it down by the North Devon line and walked a great distance over the moor so as to get it home without exciting any remarks. ⁴²He had already on his insect hunts learned to penetrate the Grimpen Mire, and so had found a safe hiding-place for the creature. ⁴³Here he kennelled it and waited his chance.

⁴⁴“But it was some time coming. ⁴⁵The old gentleman could not be decoyed outside of his grounds at night. ⁴⁶Several times Stapleton lurked about with his hound, but without avail. ⁴⁷It was during these fruitless quests that he, or rather his ally, was seen by peasants, and that the legend of the demon dog received a new confirmation. ⁴⁸He had hoped that his wife might lure Sir Charles to his ruin, but here she proved unexpectedly independent. ⁴⁹She would not endeavour to entangle the old gentleman in a sentimental attachment which might deliver him over to his enemy. ⁵⁰Threats and even, I am sorry to say, blows refused to move her. ⁵¹She would have nothing to do with it, and for a time Stapleton was at a deadlock.

⁵²“He found a way out of his difficulties through the chance that Sir Charles, who had conceived a friendship for him, made him the minister of his charity in the case of this unfortunate woman, Mrs. Laura Lyons. ⁵³By representing himself as a single man he acquired complete influence over her, and he gave her to understand that in the event of her obtaining a divorce from her husband he would marry her. ⁵⁴His plans were suddenly brought to a head by his knowledge that Sir Charles was about to leave the Hall on the advice of Dr. Mortimer, with whose opinion he himself pretended to coincide. ⁵⁵He must act at once, or his victim might get beyond his power. ⁵⁶He therefore put pressure upon Mrs. Lyons to write this letter, imploring the old man to give her an interview on the evening before his departure for London. ⁵⁷He then, by a specious argument, prevented her from going, and so had the chance for which he had waited.

⁵⁸“Driving back in the evening from Coombe Tracey he was in time to get his hound, to treat it with his infernal paint, and to bring the beast round to the gate at which he had reason to expect that he would find the old gentleman waiting. ⁵⁹The dog, incited by its master, sprang over the wicket-gate and pursued the unfortunate baronet, who fled screaming down the Yew Alley. ⁶⁰In that gloomy tunnel it must indeed have been a dreadful sight to see that huge black creature, with its flaming jaws and blazing eyes, bounding after its victim. ⁶¹He fell dead at the end of the alley from heart disease and terror. ⁶²The hound had kept upon the grassy border while the baronet had run down the path, so that no track but the man's

was visible. ⁶³On seeing him lying still the creature had probably approached to sniff at him, but finding him dead had turned away again. ⁶⁴It was then that it left the print which was actually observed by Dr. Mortimer. ⁶⁵The hound was called off and hurried away to its lair in the Grimpen Mire, and a mystery was left which puzzled the authorities, alarmed the country-side, and finally brought the case within the scope of our observation.

⁶⁶“So much for the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. ⁶⁷You perceive the devilish cunning of it, for really it would be almost impossible to make a case against the real murderer. ⁶⁸His only accomplice was one who could never give him away, and the grotesque, inconceivable nature of the device only served to make it more effective. ⁶⁹Both of the women concerned in the case, Mrs. Stapleton and Mrs. Laura Lyons, were left with a strong suspicion against Stapleton. ⁷⁰Mrs. Stapleton knew that he had designs upon the old man, and also of the existence of the hound. ⁷¹Mrs. Lyons knew neither of these things, but had been impressed by the death occurring at the time of an uncanceled appointment which was only known to him. ⁷²However, both of them were under his influence, and he had nothing to fear from them. ⁷³The first half of his task was successfully accomplished but the more difficult still remained.

⁷⁴“It is possible that Stapleton did not know of the existence of an heir in Canada. ⁷⁵In any case he would very soon learn it from his friend Dr. Mortimer, and he was told by the latter all details about the arrival of Henry Baskerville. ⁷⁶Stapleton's first idea was that this young stranger from Canada might possibly be done to death in London without coming down to Devonshire at all. ⁷⁷He distrusted his wife ever since she had refused to help him in laying a trap for the old man, and he dared not leave her long out of his sight for fear he should lose his influence over her. ⁷⁸It was for this reason that he took her to London with him. ⁷⁹They lodged, I find, at the Mexborough Private Hotel, in Craven Street, which was actually one of those called upon by my agent in search of evidence. ⁸⁰Here he kept his wife imprisoned in her room while he, disguised in a beard, followed Dr. Mortimer to Baker Street and afterwards to the station and to the Northumberland Hotel. ⁸¹His wife had some inkling of his plans; but she had such a fear of her husband—a fear founded upon brutal ill-treatment—that she dare not write to warn the man whom she knew to be in danger. ⁸²If the letter should fall into Stapleton's hands her own life would not be safe. ⁸³Eventually, as we know, she adopted the expedient of cutting out the words which would form the message, and addressing the letter in a disguised hand. ⁸⁴It reached the baronet, and gave him the first warning of his danger.

⁸⁵“It was very essential for Stapleton to get some article of Sir Henry's attire so that, in case he was driven to use the dog, he might always have the means of setting him upon his track. ⁸⁶With characteristic promptness and audacity he set about this at once, and we cannot doubt that the boots or chamber-maid of the hotel was well bribed to help him in his design. ⁸⁷By chance, however, the first boot which was procured for him was a new one and, therefore, useless for his purpose. ⁸⁸He then had it returned and obtained another—a most instructive incident, since it proved conclusively to my mind that we were dealing with a real hound, as no other supposition could explain this anxiety to obtain an old boot and this indifference to a new one. ⁸⁹The more outré and grotesque an incident is the more carefully it deserves to be examined, and the very point which appears to complicate a case is, when duly considered and scientifically handled, the one which is most likely to elucidate it.

⁹⁰“Then we had the visit from our friends next morning, shadowed always by Stapleton in the cab. ⁹¹From his knowledge of our rooms and of my appearance, as well as from his general conduct, I am inclined to think that Stapleton's career of crime has been by no means limited to this single Baskerville affair. ⁹²It is suggestive that during the last three years there have been four considerable burglaries in the West Country, for none of which was any criminal ever arrested. ⁹³The last of these, at Folkestone Court, in May, was remarkable for the cold-blooded pistoling of the page, who surprised the masked and solitary burglar. ⁹⁴I cannot doubt that Stapleton recruited his waning resources in this fashion, and that for years he has been a desperate and dangerous man.

⁹⁵“We had an example of his readiness of resource that morning when he got away from us so successfully, and also of his audacity in sending back my own name to me through the cabman. ⁹⁶From that moment he understood that I had taken over the case in London, and that therefore there was no chance for him there. ⁹⁷He returned to Dartmoor and awaited the arrival of the baronet.”

⁹⁸“One moment!” said I. ⁹⁹“You have, no doubt, described the sequence of events correctly, but there is one point which you have left unexplained. ¹⁰⁰What became of the hound when its master was in London?”

¹⁰¹“I have given some attention to this matter and it is undoubtedly of importance. ¹⁰²There can be no question that Stapleton had a confidant, though it is unlikely that he ever placed himself in his power by sharing all his plans with him. ¹⁰³There was an old manservant at Merripit House, whose name was Anthony. ¹⁰⁴His connection with the Stapletons can be traced for several years, as far back as the schoolmastering days, so that he must have been aware that his master and mistress were really husband and wife. ¹⁰⁵This man has disappeared and has escaped from the country. ¹⁰⁶It is suggestive that Anthony is not a common name in England, while Antonio is so in all Spanish or Spanish-American countries. ¹⁰⁷The man, like Mrs. Stapleton herself, spoke good English, but with a curious lisping accent. ¹⁰⁸I have myself seen this old man cross the Grimpen Mire by the path which Stapleton had marked out. ¹⁰⁹It is very probable, therefore, that in the absence of his master it was he who cared for the hound, though he may never have known the purpose for which the beast was used.

¹¹⁰“The Stapletons then went down to Devonshire, whither they were soon followed by Sir Henry and you. ¹¹¹One word now as to how I stood myself at that time. ¹¹²It may possibly recur to your memory that when I examined the paper upon which the printed words were fastened I made a close inspection for the water-mark. ¹¹³In doing so I held it within a few inches of my eyes, and was conscious of a faint smell of the scent known as white jessamine. ¹¹⁴There are seventy-five perfumes, which it is very necessary that a criminal expert should be able to distinguish from each other, and cases have more than once within my own experience depended upon their prompt recognition. ¹¹⁵The scent suggested the presence of a lady, and already my thoughts began to turn towards the Stapletons. ¹¹⁶Thus I had made certain of the hound, and had guessed at the criminal before ever we went to the west country.

¹¹⁷“It was my game to watch Stapleton. ¹¹⁸It was evident, however, that I could not do this if I were with you, since he would be keenly on his guard. ¹¹⁹I deceived everybody, therefore, yourself included, and I came down secretly when I was supposed to be in London. ¹²⁰My hardships were not so great as you imagined, though such trifling details must never interfere with the investigation of a case. ¹²¹I stayed for the most part at Coombe Tracey, and only used the hut upon the moor when it was necessary to be near the scene of action. ¹²²Cartwright had come down with me, and in his disguise as a country boy he was of great assistance to me. ¹²³I was dependent upon him for food and clean linen. ¹²⁴When I was watching Stapleton, Cartwright was frequently watching you, so that I was able to keep my hand upon all the strings.

¹²⁵“I have already told you that your reports reached me rapidly, being forwarded instantly from Baker Street to Coombe Tracey. ¹²⁶They were of great service to me, and especially that one incidentally truthful piece of biography of Stapleton's. ¹²⁷I was able to establish the identity of the man and the woman and knew at last exactly how I stood. ¹²⁸The case had been considerably complicated through the incident of the escaped convict and the relations between him and the Barrymores. ¹²⁹This also you cleared up in a very effective way, though I had already come to the same conclusions from my own observations.

¹³⁰“By the time that you discovered me upon the moor I had a complete knowledge of the whole business, but I had not a case which could go to a jury. ¹³¹Even Stapleton's attempt upon Sir Henry that night which ended in the death of the unfortunate convict did not help us much in proving murder against our man. ¹³²There seemed to be no alternative but to catch him red-handed, and to do so we had

to use Sir Henry, alone and apparently unprotected, as a bait. ¹³³We did so, and at the cost of a severe shock to our client we succeeded in completing our case and driving Stapleton to his destruction. ¹³⁴That Sir Henry should have been exposed to this is, I must confess, a reproach to my management of the case, but we had no means of foreseeing the terrible and paralyzing spectacle which the beast presented, nor could we predict the fog which enabled him to burst upon us at such short notice. ¹³⁵We succeeded in our object at a cost which both the specialist and Dr. Mortimer assure me will be a temporary one. ¹³⁶A long journey may enable our friend to recover not only from his shattered nerves but also from his wounded feelings. ¹³⁷His love for the lady was deep and sincere, and to him the saddest part of all this black business was that he should have been deceived by her.

¹³⁸“It only remains to indicate the part which she had played throughout. ¹³⁹There can be no doubt that Stapleton exercised an influence over her which may have been love or may have been fear, or very possibly both, since they are by no means incompatible emotions. ¹⁴⁰It was, at least, absolutely effective. ¹⁴¹At his command she consented to pass as his sister, though he found the limits of his power over her when he endeavoured to make her the direct accessory to murder. ¹⁴²She was ready to warn Sir Henry so far as she could without implicating her husband, and again and again she tried to do so. ¹⁴³Stapleton himself seems to have been capable of jealousy, and when he saw the baronet paying court to the lady, even though it was part of his own plan, still he could not help interrupting with a passionate outburst which revealed the fiery soul which his self-contained manner so cleverly concealed. ¹⁴⁴By encouraging the intimacy he made it certain that Sir Henry would frequently come to Merripit House and that he would sooner or later get the opportunity which he desired. ¹⁴⁵On the day of the crisis, however, his wife turned suddenly against him. ¹⁴⁶She had learned something of the death of the convict, and she knew that the hound was being kept in the out-house on the evening that Sir Henry was coming to dinner. ¹⁴⁷She taxed her husband with his intended crime, and a furious scene followed, in which he showed her for the first time that she had a rival in his love. ¹⁴⁸Her fidelity turned in an instant to bitter hatred and he saw that she would betray him. ¹⁴⁹He tied her up, therefore, that she might have no chance of warning Sir Henry, and he hoped, no doubt, that when the whole country-side put down the baronet's death to the curse of his family, as they certainly would do, he could win his wife back to accept an accomplished fact and to keep silent upon what she knew. ¹⁵⁰In this I fancy that in any case he made a miscalculation, and that, if we had not been there, his doom would none the less have been sealed. ¹⁵¹A woman of Spanish blood does not condone such an injury so lightly. ¹⁵²And now, my dear Watson, without referring to my notes, I cannot give you a more detailed account of this curious case. ¹⁵³I do not know that anything essential has been left unexplained.”

¹⁵⁴“He could not hope to frighten Sir Henry to death as he had done the old uncle with his bogie hound.”

¹⁵⁵“The beast was savage and half-starved. ¹⁵⁶If its appearance did not frighten its victim to death, at least it would paralyze the resistance which might be offered.”

¹⁵⁷“No doubt. ¹⁵⁸There only remains one difficulty. ¹⁵⁹If Stapleton came into the succession, how could he explain the fact that he, the heir, had been living unannounced under another name so close to the property? ¹⁶⁰How could he claim it without causing suspicion and inquiry?”

¹⁶¹“It is a formidable difficulty, and I fear that you ask too much when you expect me to solve it. ¹⁶²The past and the present are within the field of my inquiry, but what a man may do in the future is a hard question to answer. ¹⁶³Mrs. Stapleton has heard her husband discuss the problem on several occasions. ¹⁶⁴There were three possible courses. ¹⁶⁵He might claim the property from South America, establish his identity before the British authorities there and so obtain the fortune without ever coming to England at all; or he might adopt an elaborate disguise during the short time that he need be in London; or, again, he might furnish an accomplice with the proofs and papers, putting him in as heir, and retaining a claim upon some proportion of his income. ¹⁶⁶We cannot doubt from what we know of him that he would have found some way out of the difficulty. ¹⁶⁷And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. ¹⁶⁸I

have a box for 'Les Huguenots.' ¹⁶⁹Have you heard the De Reszkes? ¹⁷⁰Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop at Marcini's for a little dinner on the way?"

The Valley Of Fear

PART I.

The Tragedy of Birlstone

Chapter I.

The Warning

¹“I am inclined to think—” said I.

²“I should do so,” Sherlock Holmes remarked impatiently.

³I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals; but I'll admit that I was annoyed at the sardonic interruption.

⁴“Really, Holmes,” said I severely, “you are a little trying at times.”

⁵He was too much absorbed with his own thoughts to give any immediate answer to my remonstrance.

⁶He leaned upon his hand, with his untasted breakfast before him, and he stared at the slip of paper which he had just drawn from its envelope. ⁷Then he took the envelope itself, held it up to the light, and very carefully studied both the exterior and the flap.

⁸“It is Porlock's writing,” said he thoughtfully. ⁹“I can hardly doubt that it is Porlock's writing, though I have seen it only twice before. ¹⁰The Greek e with the peculiar top flourish is distinctive. ¹¹But if it is Porlock, then it must be something of the very first importance.”

¹²He was speaking to himself rather than to me; but my vexation disappeared in the interest which the words awakened.

¹³“Who then is Porlock?” I asked.

¹⁴“Porlock, Watson, is a nom-de-plume, a mere identification mark; but behind it lies a shifty and evasive personality. ¹⁵In a former letter he frankly informed me that the name was not his own, and defied me ever to trace him among the teeming millions of this great city. ¹⁶Porlock is important, not for himself, but for the great man with whom he is in touch. ¹⁷Picture to yourself the pilot fish with the shark, the jackal with the lion—anything that is insignificant in companionship with what is formidable: not only formidable, Watson, but sinister—in the highest degree sinister. ¹⁸That is where he comes within my purview. ¹⁹You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?”

²⁰“The famous scientific criminal, as famous among crooks as—”

²¹“My blushes, Watson!” Holmes murmured in a deprecating voice.

²²“I was about to say, as he is unknown to the public.”

²³“A touch! ²⁴A distinct touch!” cried Holmes. ²⁵“You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself. ²⁶But in calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law—and there lie the glory and the wonder of it! ²⁷The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain which might have made or marred the destiny of nations—that's the man! ²⁸But so aloof is he from general suspicion, so immune from criticism, so admirable in his management and self-effacement, that for those very words that you have uttered he could hale you to a court and emerge with your year's pension as a solatium for his wounded character. ²⁹Is he not the celebrated author of *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there

was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it? ³⁰Is this a man to traduce? ³¹Foul-mouthed doctor and slandered professor—such would be your respective roles! ³²That's genius, Watson. ³³But if I am spared by lesser men, our day will surely come.”

³⁴“May I be there to see!” I exclaimed devoutly. ³⁵“But you were speaking of this man Porlock.”

³⁶“Ah, yes—the so-called Porlock is a link in the chain some little way from its great attachment.

³⁷Porlock is not quite a sound link—between ourselves. ³⁸He is the only flaw in that chain so far as I have been able to test it.”

³⁹“But no chain is stronger than its weakest link.”

⁴⁰“Exactly, my dear Watson! ⁴¹Hence the extreme importance of Porlock. ⁴²Led on by some rudimentary aspirations towards right, and encouraged by the judicious stimulation of an occasional ten-pound note sent to him by devious methods, he has once or twice given me advance information which has been of value—that highest value which anticipates and prevents rather than avenges crime. ⁴³I cannot doubt that, if we had the cipher, we should find that this communication is of the nature that I indicate.”

⁴⁴Again Holmes flattened out the paper upon his unused plate. ⁴⁵I rose and, leaning over him, stared down at the curious inscription, which ran as follows:

⁴⁶534 C2 13 127 36 31 4 17 21 41

⁴⁷DOUGLAS 109 293 5 37 BIRLSTONE

⁴⁸26 BIRLSTONE 9 47 171

⁴⁹“What do you make of it, Holmes?”

⁵⁰“It is obviously an attempt to convey secret information.”

⁵¹“But what is the use of a cipher message without the cipher?”

⁵²“In this instance, none at all.”

⁵³“Why do you say ‘in this instance’?”

⁵⁴“Because there are many ciphers which I would read as easily as I do the apocrypha of the agony column: such crude devices amuse the intelligence without fatiguing it. ⁵⁵But this is different. ⁵⁶It is clearly a reference to the words in a page of some book. ⁵⁷Until I am told which page and which book I am powerless.”

⁵⁸“But why ‘Douglas’ and ‘Birlstone’?”

⁵⁹“Clearly because those are words which were not contained in the page in question.”

⁶⁰“Then why has he not indicated the book?”

⁶¹“Your native shrewdness, my dear Watson, that innate cunning which is the delight of your friends, would surely prevent you from inclosing cipher and message in the same envelope. ⁶²Should it miscarry, you are undone. ⁶³As it is, both have to go wrong before any harm comes from it. ⁶⁴Our second post is now overdue, and I shall be surprised if it does not bring us either a further letter of explanation, or, as is more probable, the very volume to which these figures refer.”

⁶⁵Holmes's calculation was fulfilled within a very few minutes by the appearance of Billy, the page, with the very letter which we were expecting.

⁶⁶“The same writing,” remarked Holmes, as he opened the envelope, “and actually signed,” he added in an exultant voice as he unfolded the epistle. ⁶⁷“Come, we are getting on, Watson.” ⁶⁸His brow clouded, however, as he glanced over the contents.

⁶⁹“Dear me, this is very disappointing! ⁷⁰I fear, Watson, that all our expectations come to nothing. ⁷¹I trust that the man Porlock will come to no harm.

⁷²“Dear Mr. Holmes [he says]:

⁷³“I will go no further in this matter. ⁷⁴It is too dangerous—he suspects me. ⁷⁵I can see that he suspects me. ⁷⁶He came to me quite unexpectedly after I had actually addressed this envelope with the intention of sending you the key to the cipher. ⁷⁷I was able to cover it up. ⁷⁸If he had seen it, it would have gone hard with me. ⁷⁹But I read suspicion in his eyes. ⁸⁰Please burn the cipher message, which can now be of no use to you.

⁸¹“Fred Porlock.”

⁸²Holmes sat for some little time twisting this letter between his fingers, and frowning, as he stared into the fire.

⁸³“After all,” he said at last, “there may be nothing in it. ⁸⁴It may be only his guilty conscience. ⁸⁵Knowing himself to be a traitor, he may have read the accusation in the other's eyes.”

⁸⁶“The other being, I presume, Professor Moriarty.”

⁸⁷“No less! ⁸⁸When any of that party talk about ‘He’ you know whom they mean. ⁸⁹There is one predominant ‘He’ for all of them.”

⁹⁰“But what can he do?”

⁹¹“Hum! ⁹²That's a large question. ⁹³When you have one of the first brains of Europe up against you, and all the powers of darkness at his back, there are infinite possibilities. ⁹⁴Anyhow, Friend Porlock is evidently scared out of his senses—kindly compare the writing in the note to that upon its envelope; which was done, he tells us, before this ill-omened visit. ⁹⁵The one is clear and firm. ⁹⁶The other hardly legible.”

⁹⁷“Why did he write at all? ⁹⁸Why did he not simply drop it?”

⁹⁹“Because he feared I would make some inquiry after him in that case, and possibly bring trouble on him.”

¹⁰⁰“No doubt,” said I. ¹⁰¹“Of course.” ¹⁰²I had picked up the original cipher message and was bending my brows over it. ¹⁰³“It's pretty maddening to think that an important secret may lie here on this slip of paper, and that it is beyond human power to penetrate it.”

¹⁰⁴Sherlock Holmes had pushed away his untasted breakfast and lit the unsavoury pipe which was the companion of his deepest meditations. ¹⁰⁵“I wonder!” said he, leaning back and staring at the ceiling. ¹⁰⁶“Perhaps there are points which have escaped your Machiavellian intellect. ¹⁰⁷Let us consider the problem in the light of pure reason. ¹⁰⁸This man's reference is to a book. ¹⁰⁹That is our point of departure.”

¹¹⁰“A somewhat vague one.”

¹¹¹“Let us see then if we can narrow it down. ¹¹²As I focus my mind upon it, it seems rather less impenetrable. ¹¹³What indications have we as to this book?”

¹¹⁴“None.”

¹¹⁵“Well, well, it is surely not quite so bad as that. ¹¹⁶The cipher message begins with a large 534, does it not? ¹¹⁷We may take it as a working hypothesis that 534 is the particular page to which the cipher refers. ¹¹⁸So our book has already become a large book which is surely something gained. ¹¹⁹What other indications have we as to the nature of this large book? ¹²⁰The next sign is C2. ¹²¹What do you make of that, Watson?”

¹²²“Chapter the second, no doubt.”

¹²³“Hardly that, Watson. ¹²⁴You will, I am sure, agree with me that if the page be given, the number of the chapter is immaterial. ¹²⁵Also that if page 534 finds us only in the second chapter, the length of the first one must have been really intolerable.”

¹²⁶“Column!” I cried.

¹²⁷“Brilliant, Watson. ¹²⁸You are scintillating this morning. ¹²⁹If it is not column, then I am very much deceived. ¹³⁰So now, you see, we begin to visualize a large book printed in double columns which are each of a considerable length, since one of the words is numbered in the document as the two hundred and ninety-third. ¹³¹Have we reached the limits of what reason can supply?”

¹³²“I fear that we have.”

¹³³“Surely you do yourself an injustice. ¹³⁴One more coruscation, my dear Watson—yet another brain-wave! ¹³⁵Had the volume been an unusual one, he would have sent it to me. ¹³⁶Instead of that, he had intended, before his plans were nipped, to send me the clue in this envelope. ¹³⁷He says so in his note. ¹³⁸This would seem to indicate that the book is one which he thought I would have no difficulty in finding for myself. ¹³⁹He had it—and he imagined that I would have it, too. ¹⁴⁰In short, Watson, it is a very common book.”

¹⁴¹“What you say certainly sounds plausible.”

¹⁴²“So we have contracted our field of search to a large book, printed in double columns and in common use.”

¹⁴³“The Bible!” I cried triumphantly.

¹⁴⁴“Good, Watson, good! ¹⁴⁵But not, if I may say so, quite good enough! ¹⁴⁶Even if I accepted the compliment for myself I could hardly name any volume which would be less likely to lie at the elbow of one of Moriarty's associates. ¹⁴⁷Besides, the editions of Holy Writ are so numerous that he could hardly suppose that two copies would have the same pagination. ¹⁴⁸This is clearly a book which is standardized. ¹⁴⁹He knows for certain that his page 534 will exactly agree with my page 534.”

¹⁵⁰“But very few books would correspond with that.”

¹⁵¹“Exactly. ¹⁵²Therein lies our salvation. ¹⁵³Our search is narrowed down to standardized books which anyone may be supposed to possess.”

¹⁵⁴“Bradshaw!”

¹⁵⁵“There are difficulties, Watson. ¹⁵⁶The vocabulary of Bradshaw is nervous and terse, but limited. ¹⁵⁷The selection of words would hardly lend itself to the sending of general messages. ¹⁵⁸We will eliminate Bradshaw. ¹⁵⁹The dictionary is, I fear, inadmissible for the same reason. ¹⁶⁰What then is left?”

¹⁶¹“An almanac!”

¹⁶²“Excellent, Watson! ¹⁶³I am very much mistaken if you have not touched the spot. ¹⁶⁴An almanac! ¹⁶⁵Let us consider the claims of Whitaker's Almanac. ¹⁶⁶It is in common use. ¹⁶⁷It has the requisite number of pages. ¹⁶⁸It is in double column. ¹⁶⁹Though reserved in its earlier vocabulary, it becomes, if

I remember right, quite garrulous towards the end.”¹⁷⁰ He picked the volume from his desk.¹⁷¹ “Here is page 534, column two, a substantial block of print dealing, I perceive, with the trade and resources of British India.¹⁷² Jot down the words, Watson! ¹⁷³Number thirteen is ‘Mahratta.’ ¹⁷⁴Not, I fear, a very auspicious beginning. ¹⁷⁵Number one hundred and twenty-seven is ‘Government’; which at least makes sense, though somewhat irrelevant to ourselves and Professor Moriarty. ¹⁷⁶Now let us try again. ¹⁷⁷What does the Mahratta government do? ¹⁷⁸Alas! the next word is ‘pig’s-bristles.’ ¹⁷⁹We are undone, my good Watson! ¹⁸⁰It is finished!”

¹⁸¹He had spoken in jesting vein, but the twitching of his bushy eyebrows bespoke his disappointment and irritation. ¹⁸²I sat helpless and unhappy, staring into the fire. ¹⁸³A long silence was broken by a sudden exclamation from Holmes, who dashed at a cupboard, from which he emerged with a second yellow-covered volume in his hand.

¹⁸⁴“We pay the price, Watson, for being too up-to-date!” he cried. ¹⁸⁵“We are before our time, and suffer the usual penalties. ¹⁸⁶Being the seventh of January, we have very properly laid in the new almanac. ¹⁸⁷It is more than likely that Porlock took his message from the old one. ¹⁸⁸No doubt he would have told us so had his letter of explanation been written. ¹⁸⁹Now let us see what page 534 has in store for us. ¹⁹⁰Number thirteen is ‘There,’ which is much more promising. ¹⁹¹Number one hundred and twenty-seven is ‘is’—‘There is’—” ¹⁹²Holmes’s eyes were gleaming with excitement, and his thin, nervous fingers twitched as he counted the words—“‘danger.’ ¹⁹³Ha! ¹⁹⁴Ha! ¹⁹⁵Capital! ¹⁹⁶Put that down, Watson. ¹⁹⁷‘There is danger—may—come—very—soon—one.’ ¹⁹⁸Then we have the name ‘Douglas’—‘rich—country—now—at—Birlstone—House—Birlstone—confidence—is—pressing.’ ¹⁹⁹There, Watson! ²⁰⁰What do you think of pure reason and its fruit? ²⁰¹If the greengrocer had such a thing as a laurel wreath, I should send Billy round for it.”

²⁰²I was staring at the strange message which I had scrawled, as he deciphered it, upon a sheet of foolscap on my knee.

²⁰³“What a queer, scrambling way of expressing his meaning!” said I.

²⁰⁴“On the contrary, he has done quite remarkably well,” said Holmes. ²⁰⁵“When you search a single column for words with which to express your meaning, you can hardly expect to get everything you want. ²⁰⁶You are bound to leave something to the intelligence of your correspondent. ²⁰⁷The purport is perfectly clear. ²⁰⁸Some deviltry is intended against one Douglas, whoever he may be, residing as stated, a rich country gentleman. ²⁰⁹He is sure—‘confidence’ was as near as he could get to ‘confident’—that it is pressing. ²¹⁰There is our result—and a very workmanlike little bit of analysis it was!”

²¹¹Holmes had the impersonal joy of the true artist in his better work, even as he mourned darkly when it fell below the high level to which he aspired. ²¹²He was still chuckling over his success when Billy swung open the door and Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard was ushered into the room.

²¹³Those were the early days at the end of the ‘80’s, when Alec MacDonald was far from having attained the national fame which he has now achieved. ²¹⁴He was a young but trusted member of the detective force, who had distinguished himself in several cases which had been entrusted to him. ²¹⁵His tall, bony figure gave promise of exceptional physical strength, while his great cranium and deep-set, lustrous eyes spoke no less clearly of the keen intelligence which twinkled out from behind his bushy eyebrows. ²¹⁶He was a silent, precise man with a dour nature and a hard Aberdonian accent.

²¹⁷Twice already in his career had Holmes helped him to attain success, his own sole reward being the intellectual joy of the problem. ²¹⁸For this reason the affection and respect of the Scotchman for his amateur colleague were profound, and he showed them by the frankness with which he consulted Holmes in every difficulty. ²¹⁹Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself; but talent instantly recognizes genius, and MacDonald had talent enough for his profession to enable him to perceive that there was no humiliation in seeking the assistance of one who already stood alone in Europe, both in

his gifts and in his experience. ²²⁰Holmes was not prone to friendship, but he was tolerant of the big Scotchman, and smiled at the sight of him.

²²¹“You are an early bird, Mr. Mac,” said he. ²²²“I wish you luck with your worm. ²²³I fear this means that there is some mischief afoot.”

²²⁴“If you said ‘hope’ instead of ‘fear,’ it would be nearer the truth, I’m thinking, Mr. Holmes,” the inspector answered, with a knowing grin. ²²⁵“Well, maybe a wee nip would keep out the raw morning chill. ²²⁶No, I won’t smoke, I thank you. ²²⁷I’ll have to be pushing on my way; for the early hours of a case are the precious ones, as no man knows better than your own self. ²²⁸But—but—”

²²⁹The inspector had stopped suddenly, and was staring with a look of absolute amazement at a paper upon the table. ²³⁰It was the sheet upon which I had scrawled the enigmatic message.

²³¹“Douglas!” he stammered. ²³²“Birlstone! ²³³What’s this, Mr. Holmes? ²³⁴Man, it’s witchcraft! ²³⁵Where in the name of all that is wonderful did you get those names?”

²³⁶“It is a cipher that Dr. Watson and I have had occasion to solve. ²³⁷But why—what’s amiss with the names?”

²³⁸The inspector looked from one to the other of us in dazed astonishment. ²³⁹“Just this,” said he, “that Mr. Douglas of Birlstone Manor House was horribly murdered last night!”

Chapter II.

Sherlock Holmes Discourses

¹It was one of those dramatic moments for which my friend existed. ²It would be an overstatement to say that he was shocked or even excited by the amazing announcement. ³Without having a tinge of cruelty in his singular composition, he was undoubtedly callous from long over-stimulation. ⁴Yet, if his emotions were dulled, his intellectual perceptions were exceedingly active. ⁵There was no trace then of the horror which I had myself felt at this curt declaration; but his face showed rather the quiet and interested composure of the chemist who sees the crystals falling into position from his oversaturated solution.

⁶“Remarkable!” said he. ⁷“Remarkable!”

⁸“You don't seem surprised.”

⁹“Interested, Mr. Mac, but hardly surprised. ¹⁰Why should I be surprised? ¹¹I receive an anonymous communication from a quarter which I know to be important, warning me that danger threatens a certain person. ¹²Within an hour I learn that this danger has actually materialized and that the person is dead. ¹³I am interested; but, as you observe, I am not surprised.”

¹⁴In a few short sentences he explained to the inspector the facts about the letter and the cipher. ¹⁵MacDonald sat with his chin on his hands and his great sandy eyebrows bunched into a yellow tangle.

¹⁶“I was going down to Birlstone this morning,” said he. ¹⁷“I had come to ask you if you cared to come with me—you and your friend here. ¹⁸But from what you say we might perhaps be doing better work in London.”

¹⁹“I rather think not,” said Holmes.

²⁰“Hang it all, Mr. Holmes!” cried the inspector. ²¹“The papers will be full of the Birlstone mystery in a day or two; but where's the mystery if there is a man in London who prophesied the crime before ever it occurred? ²²We have only to lay our hands on that man, and the rest will follow.”

²³“No doubt, Mr. Mac. ²⁴But how do you propose to lay your hands on the so-called Porlock?”

²⁵MacDonald turned over the letter which Holmes had handed him. ²⁶“Posted in Camberwell—that doesn't help us much. ²⁷Name, you say, is assumed. ²⁸Not much to go on, certainly. ²⁹Didn't you say that you have sent him money?”

³⁰“Twice.”

³¹“And how?”

³²“In notes to Camberwell post-office.”

³³“Did you ever trouble to see who called for them?”

³⁴“No.”

³⁵The inspector looked surprised and a little shocked. ³⁶“Why not?”

³⁷“Because I always keep faith. ³⁸I had promised when he first wrote that I would not try to trace him.”

³⁹“You think there is someone behind him?”

⁴⁰“I know there is.”

⁴¹“This professor that I've heard you mention?”

⁴²“Exactly!”

⁴³Inspector MacDonald smiled, and his eyelid quivered as he glanced towards me. ⁴⁴“I won't conceal from you, Mr. Holmes, that we think in the C. I. D. that you have a wee bit of a bee in your bonnet over this professor. ⁴⁵I made some inquiries myself about the matter. ⁴⁶He seems to be a very respectable, learned, and talented sort of man.”

⁴⁷“I'm glad you've got so far as to recognize the talent.”

⁴⁸“Man, you can't but recognize it! ⁴⁹After I heard your view I made it my business to see him. ⁵⁰I had a chat with him on eclipses. ⁵¹How the talk got that way I canna think; but he had out a reflector lantern and a globe, and made it all clear in a minute. ⁵²He lent me a book; but I don't mind saying that it was a bit above my head, though I had a good Aberdeen upbringing. ⁵³He'd have made a grand meenister with his thin face and gray hair and solemn-like way of talking. ⁵⁴When he put his hand on my shoulder as we were parting, it was like a father's blessing before you go out into the cold, cruel world.”

⁵⁵Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands. ⁵⁶“Great!” he said. ⁵⁷“Great! ⁵⁸Tell me, Friend MacDonald, this pleasing and touching interview was, I suppose, in the professor's study?”

⁵⁹“That's so.”

⁶⁰“A fine room, is it not?”

⁶¹“Very fine—very handsome indeed, Mr. Holmes.”

⁶²“You sat in front of his writing desk?”

⁶³“Just so.”

⁶⁴“Sun in your eyes and his face in the shadow?”

⁶⁵“Well, it was evening; but I mind that the lamp was turned on my face.”

⁶⁶“It would be. ⁶⁷Did you happen to observe a picture over the professor's head?”

⁶⁸“I don't miss much, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁹Maybe I learned that from you. ⁷⁰Yes, I saw the picture—a young woman with her head on her hands, peeping at you sideways.”

⁷¹“That painting was by Jean Baptiste Greuze.”

⁷²The inspector endeavoured to look interested.

⁷³“Jean Baptiste Greuze,” Holmes continued, joining his finger tips and leaning well back in his chair, “was a French artist who flourished between the years 1750 and 1800. ⁷⁴I allude, of course to his working career. ⁷⁵Modern criticism has more than indorsed the high opinion formed of him by his contemporaries.”

⁷⁶The inspector's eyes grew abstracted. ⁷⁷“Hadn't we better—” he said.

⁷⁸“We are doing so,” Holmes interrupted. ⁷⁹“All that I am saying has a very direct and vital bearing upon what you have called the Birlstone Mystery. ⁸⁰In fact, it may in a sense be called the very centre of it.”

⁸¹MacDonald smiled feebly, and looked appealingly to me. ⁸²“Your thoughts move a bit too quick for me, Mr. Holmes. ⁸³You leave out a link or two, and I can't get over the gap. ⁸⁴What in the whole wide world can be the connection between this dead painting man and the affair at Birlstone?”

⁸⁵“All knowledge comes useful to the detective,” remarked Holmes. ⁸⁶“Even the trivial fact that in the year 1865 a picture by Greuze entitled *La Jeune Fille a l'Agneau* fetched one million two hundred thousand francs—more than forty thousand pounds—at the Portalis sale may start a train of reflection in your mind.”

⁸⁷It was clear that it did. ⁸⁸The inspector looked honestly interested.

⁸⁹“I may remind you,” Holmes continued, “that the professor's salary can be ascertained in several trustworthy books of reference. ⁹⁰It is seven hundred a year.”

⁹¹“Then how could he buy—”

⁹²“Quite so! ⁹³How could he?”

⁹⁴“Ay, that's remarkable,” said the inspector thoughtfully. ⁹⁵“Talk away, Mr. Holmes. ⁹⁶I'm just loving it. ⁹⁷It's fine!”

⁹⁸Holmes smiled. ⁹⁹He was always warmed by genuine admiration—the characteristic of the real artist. ¹⁰⁰“What about Birlstone?” he asked.

¹⁰¹“We've time yet,” said the inspector, glancing at his watch. ¹⁰²“I've a cab at the door, and it won't take us twenty minutes to Victoria. ¹⁰³But about this picture: I thought you told me once, Mr. Holmes, that you had never met Professor Moriarty.”

¹⁰⁴“No, I never have.”

¹⁰⁵“Then how do you know about his rooms?”

¹⁰⁶“Ah, that's another matter. ¹⁰⁷I have been three times in his rooms, twice waiting for him under different pretexts and leaving before he came. ¹⁰⁸Once—well, I can hardly tell about the once to an official detective. ¹⁰⁹It was on the last occasion that I took the liberty of running over his papers—with the most unexpected results.”

¹¹⁰“You found something compromising?”

¹¹¹“Absolutely nothing. ¹¹²That was what amazed me. ¹¹³However, you have now seen the point of the picture. ¹¹⁴It shows him to be a very wealthy man. ¹¹⁵How did he acquire wealth? ¹¹⁶He is unmarried. ¹¹⁷His younger brother is a station master in the west of England. ¹¹⁸His chair is worth seven hundred a year. ¹¹⁹And he owns a Greuze.”

¹²⁰“Well?”

¹²¹“Surely the inference is plain.”

¹²²“You mean that he has a great income and that he must earn it in an illegal fashion?”

¹²³“Exactly. ¹²⁴Of course I have other reasons for thinking so—dozens of exiguous threads which lead vaguely up towards the centre of the web where the poisonous, motionless creature is lurking. ¹²⁵I only mention the Greuze because it brings the matter within the range of your own observation.”

¹²⁶“Well, Mr. Holmes, I admit that what you say is interesting: it's more than interesting—it's just wonderful. ¹²⁷But let us have it a little clearer if you can. ¹²⁸Is it forgery, coining, burglary—where does the money come from?”

¹²⁹“Have you ever read of Jonathan Wild?”

¹³⁰“Well, the name has a familiar sound. ¹³¹Someone in a novel, was he not? ¹³²I don't take much stock of detectives in novels—chaps that do things and never let you see how they do them. ¹³³That's just inspiration: not business.”

¹³⁴“Jonathan Wild wasn't a detective, and he wasn't in a novel. ¹³⁵He was a master criminal, and he lived last century—1750 or thereabouts.”

¹³⁶“Then he's no use to me. ¹³⁷I'm a practical man.”

¹³⁸“Mr. Mac, the most practical thing that you ever did in your life would be to shut yourself up for three months and read twelve hours a day at the annals of crime. ¹³⁹Everything comes in circles—even Professor Moriarty. ¹⁴⁰Jonathan Wild was the hidden force of the London criminals, to whom he sold his brains and his organization on a fifteen per cent commission. ¹⁴¹The old wheel turns, and the same spoke comes up. ¹⁴²It's all been done before, and will be again. ¹⁴³I'll tell you one or two things about Moriarty which may interest you.”

¹⁴⁴“You'll interest me, right enough.”

¹⁴⁵“I happen to know who is the first link in his chain—a chain with this Napoleon-gone-wrong at one end, and a hundred broken fighting men, pickpockets, blackmailers, and card sharpers at the other, with every sort of crime in between. ¹⁴⁶His chief of staff is Colonel Sebastian Moran, as aloof and guarded and inaccessible to the law as himself. ¹⁴⁷What do you think he pays him?”

¹⁴⁸“I'd like to hear.”

¹⁴⁹“Six thousand a year. ¹⁵⁰That's paying for brains, you see—the American business principle. ¹⁵¹I learned that detail quite by chance. ¹⁵²It's more than the Prime Minister gets. ¹⁵³That gives you an idea of Moriarty's gains and of the scale on which he works. ¹⁵⁴Another point: I made it my business to hunt down some of Moriarty's checks lately—just common innocent checks that he pays his household bills with. ¹⁵⁵They were drawn on six different banks. ¹⁵⁶Does that make any impression on your mind?”

¹⁵⁷“Queer, certainly! ¹⁵⁸But what do you gather from it?”

¹⁵⁹“That he wanted no gossip about his wealth. ¹⁶⁰No single man should know what he had. ¹⁶¹I have no doubt that he has twenty banking accounts; the bulk of his fortune abroad in the Deutsche Bank or the Credit Lyonnais as likely as not. ¹⁶²Sometime when you have a year or two to spare I commend to you the study of Professor Moriarty.”

¹⁶³Inspector MacDonald had grown steadily more impressed as the conversation proceeded. ¹⁶⁴He had lost himself in his interest. ¹⁶⁵Now his practical Scotch intelligence brought him back with a snap to the matter in hand.

¹⁶⁶“He can keep, anyhow,” said he. ¹⁶⁷“You've got us side-tracked with your interesting anecdotes, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁶⁸What really counts is your remark that there is some connection between the professor and the crime. ¹⁶⁹That you get from the warning received through the man Porlock. ¹⁷⁰Can we for our present practical needs get any further than that?”

¹⁷¹“We may form some conception as to the motives of the crime. ¹⁷²It is, as I gather from your original remarks, an inexplicable, or at least an unexplained, murder. ¹⁷³Now, presuming that the source of the crime is as we suspect it to be, there might be two different motives. ¹⁷⁴In the first place, I may tell you that Moriarty rules with a rod of iron over his people. ¹⁷⁵His discipline is tremendous. ¹⁷⁶There is only one punishment in his code. ¹⁷⁷It is death. ¹⁷⁸Now we might suppose that this murdered man—this Douglas whose approaching fate was known by one of the arch-criminal's subordinates—had in some way betrayed the chief. ¹⁷⁹His punishment followed, and would be known to all—if only to put the fear of death into them.”

¹⁸⁰“Well, that is one suggestion, Mr. Holmes.”

¹⁸¹“The other is that it has been engineered by Moriarty in the ordinary course of business. ¹⁸²Was there any robbery?”

¹⁸³“I have not heard.”

¹⁸⁴“If so, it would, of course, be against the first hypothesis and in favour of the second. ¹⁸⁵Moriarty may have been engaged to engineer it on a promise of part spoils, or he may have been paid so much down to manage it. ¹⁸⁶Either is possible. ¹⁸⁷But whichever it may be, or if it is some third combination, it is down at Birlstone that we must seek the solution. ¹⁸⁸I know our man too well to suppose that he has left anything up here which may lead us to him.”

¹⁸⁹“Then to Birlstone we must go!” cried MacDonald, jumping from his chair. ¹⁹⁰“My word! it's later than I thought. ¹⁹¹I can give you, gentlemen, five minutes for preparation, and that is all.”

¹⁹²“And ample for us both,” said Holmes, as he sprang up and hastened to change from his dressing gown to his coat. ¹⁹³“While we are on our way, Mr. Mac, I will ask you to be good enough to tell me all about it.”

¹⁹⁴“All about it” proved to be disappointingly little, and yet there was enough to assure us that the case before us might well be worthy of the expert's closest attention. ¹⁹⁵He brightened and rubbed his thin hands together as he listened to the meagre but remarkable details. ¹⁹⁶A long series of sterile weeks lay behind us, and here at last there was a fitting object for those remarkable powers which, like all special gifts, become irksome to their owner when they are not in use. ¹⁹⁷That razor brain blunted and rusted with inaction.

¹⁹⁸Sherlock Holmes's eyes glistened, his pale cheeks took a warmer hue, and his whole eager face shone with an inward light when the call for work reached him. ¹⁹⁹Leaning forward in the cab, he listened intently to MacDonald's short sketch of the problem which awaited us in Sussex. ²⁰⁰The inspector was himself dependent, as he explained to us, upon a scribbled account forwarded to him by the milk train in the early hours of the morning. ²⁰¹White Mason, the local officer, was a personal friend, and hence MacDonald had been notified much more promptly than is usual at Scotland Yard when provincials need their assistance. ²⁰²It is a very cold scent upon which the Metropolitan expert is generally asked to run.

²⁰³“Dear Inspector MacDonald [said the letter which he read to us]:

²⁰⁴“Official requisition for your services is in separate envelope. ²⁰⁵This is for your private eye. ²⁰⁶Wire me what train in the morning you can get for Birlstone, and I will meet it—or have it met if I am too occupied. ²⁰⁷This case is a snorter. ²⁰⁸Don't waste a moment in getting started. ²⁰⁹If you can bring Mr. Holmes, please do so; for he will find something after his own heart. ²¹⁰We would think the whole thing had been fixed up for theatrical effect if there wasn't a dead man in the middle of it. ²¹¹My word! it is a snorter.”

²¹²“Your friend seems to be no fool,” remarked Holmes.

²¹³“No, sir, White Mason is a very live man, if I am any judge.”

²¹⁴“Well, have you anything more?”

²¹⁵“Only that he will give us every detail when we meet.”

²¹⁶“Then how did you get at Mr. Douglas and the fact that he had been horribly murdered?”

²¹⁷“That was in the enclosed official report. ²¹⁸It didn't say ‘horrible’: that's not a recognized official term. ²¹⁹It gave the name John Douglas. ²²⁰It mentioned that his injuries had been in the head, from the discharge of a shotgun. ²²¹It also mentioned the hour of the alarm, which was close on to midnight last night. ²²²It added that the case was undoubtedly one of murder, but that no arrest had been made, and that the case was one which presented some very perplexing and extraordinary features. ²²³That's absolutely all we have at present, Mr. Holmes.”

²²⁴“Then, with your permission, we will leave it at that, Mr. Mac. ²²⁵The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession. ²²⁶I can see only two things for certain at present—a great brain in London, and a dead man in Sussex. ²²⁷It's the chain between that we are going to trace.”

Chapter III.

The Tragedy of Birlstone

¹Now for a moment I will ask leave to remove my own insignificant personality and to describe events which occurred before we arrived upon the scene by the light of knowledge which came to us afterwards. ²Only in this way can I make the reader appreciate the people concerned and the strange setting in which their fate was cast.

³The village of Birlstone is a small and very ancient cluster of half-timbered cottages on the northern border of the county of Sussex. ⁴For centuries it had remained unchanged; but within the last few years its picturesque appearance and situation have attracted a number of well-to-do residents, whose villas peep out from the woods around. ⁵These woods are locally supposed to be the extreme fringe of the great Weald forest, which thins away until it reaches the northern chalk downs. ⁶A number of small shops have come into being to meet the wants of the increased population; so there seems some prospect that Birlstone may soon grow from an ancient village into a modern town. ⁷It is the centre for a considerable area of country, since Tunbridge Wells, the nearest place of importance, is ten or twelve miles to the eastward, over the borders of Kent.

⁸About half a mile from the town, standing in an old park famous for its huge beech trees, is the ancient Manor House of Birlstone. ⁹Part of this venerable building dates back to the time of the first crusade, when Hugo de Capus built a fortalice in the centre of the estate, which had been granted to him by the Red King. ¹⁰This was destroyed by fire in 1543, and some of its smoke-blackened corner stones were used when, in Jacobean times, a brick country house rose upon the ruins of the feudal castle.

¹¹The Manor House, with its many gables and its small diamond-paned windows, was still much as the builder had left it in the early seventeenth century. ¹²Of the double moats which had guarded its more warlike predecessor, the outer had been allowed to dry up, and served the humble function of a kitchen garden. ¹³The inner one was still there, and lay forty feet in breadth, though now only a few feet in depth, round the whole house. ¹⁴A small stream fed it and continued beyond it, so that the sheet of water, though turbid, was never ditch-like or unhealthy. ¹⁵The ground floor windows were within a foot of the surface of the water.

¹⁶The only approach to the house was over a drawbridge, the chains and windlass of which had long been rusted and broken. ¹⁷The latest tenants of the Manor House had, however, with characteristic energy, set this right, and the drawbridge was not only capable of being raised, but actually was raised every evening and lowered every morning. ¹⁸By thus renewing the custom of the old feudal days the Manor House was converted into an island during the night—a fact which had a very direct bearing upon the mystery which was soon to engage the attention of all England.

¹⁹The house had been untenanted for some years and was threatening to moulder into a picturesque decay when the Douglasses took possession of it. ²⁰This family consisted of only two individuals—John Douglas and his wife. ²¹Douglas was a remarkable man, both in character and in person. ²²In age he may have been about fifty, with a strong-jawed, rugged face, a grizzling moustache, peculiarly keen gray eyes, and a wiry, vigorous figure which had lost nothing of the strength and activity of youth. ²³He was cheery and genial to all, but somewhat offhand in his manners, giving the impression that he had seen life in social strata on some far lower horizon than the county society of Sussex.

²⁴Yet, though looked at with some curiosity and reserve by his more cultivated neighbours, he soon acquired a great popularity among the villagers, subscribing handsomely to all local objects, and attending their smoking concerts and other functions, where, having a remarkably rich tenor voice, he was always ready to oblige with an excellent song. ²⁵He appeared to have plenty of money, which was

said to have been gained in the California gold fields, and it was clear from his own talk and that of his wife that he had spent a part of his life in America.

²⁶The good impression which had been produced by his generosity and by his democratic manners was increased by a reputation gained for utter indifference to danger. ²⁷Though a wretched rider, he turned out at every meet, and took the most amazing falls in his determination to hold his own with the best. ²⁸When the vicarage caught fire he distinguished himself also by the fearlessness with which he reentered the building to save property, after the local fire brigade had given it up as impossible. ²⁹Thus it came about that John Douglas of the Manor House had within five years won himself quite a reputation in Birlstone.

³⁰His wife, too, was popular with those who had made her acquaintance; though, after the English fashion, the callers upon a stranger who settled in the county without introductions were few and far between. ³¹This mattered the less to her, as she was retiring by disposition, and very much absorbed, to all appearance, in her husband and her domestic duties. ³²It was known that she was an English lady who had met Mr. Douglas in London, he being at that time a widower. ³³She was a beautiful woman, tall, dark, and slender, some twenty years younger than her husband, a disparity which seemed in no wise to mar the contentment of their family life.

³⁴It was remarked sometimes, however, by those who knew them best, that the confidence between the two did not appear to be complete, since the wife was either very reticent about her husband's past life, or else, as seemed more likely, was imperfectly informed about it. ³⁵It had also been noted and commented upon by a few observant people that there were signs sometimes of some nerve-strain upon the part of Mrs. Douglas, and that she would display acute uneasiness if her absent husband should ever be particularly late in his return. ³⁶On a quiet countryside, where all gossip is welcome, this weakness of the lady of the Manor House did not pass without remark, and it bulked larger upon people's memory when the events arose which gave it a very special significance.

³⁷There was yet another individual whose residence under that roof was, it is true, only an intermittent one, but whose presence at the time of the strange happenings which will now be narrated brought his name prominently before the public. ³⁸This was Cecil James Barker, of Hales Lodge, Hampstead.

³⁹Cecil Barker's tall, loose-jointed figure was a familiar one in the main street of Birlstone village; for he was a frequent and welcome visitor at the Manor House. ⁴⁰He was the more noticed as being the only friend of the past unknown life of Mr. Douglas who was ever seen in his new English surroundings.

⁴¹Barker was himself an undoubted Englishman; but by his remarks it was clear that he had first known Douglas in America and had there lived on intimate terms with him. ⁴²He appeared to be a man of considerable wealth, and was reputed to be a bachelor.

⁴³In age he was rather younger than Douglas—forty-five at the most—a tall, straight, broad-chested fellow with a clean-shaved, prize-fighter face, thick, strong, black eyebrows, and a pair of masterful black eyes which might, even without the aid of his very capable hands, clear a way for him through a hostile crowd. ⁴⁴He neither rode nor shot, but spent his days in wandering round the old village with his pipe in his mouth, or in driving with his host, or in his absence with his hostess, over the beautiful countryside. ⁴⁵“An easy-going, free-handed gentleman,” said Ames, the butler. ⁴⁶“But, my word! ⁴⁷I had rather not be the man that crossed him!” ⁴⁸He was cordial and intimate with Douglas, and he was no less friendly with his wife—a friendship which more than once seemed to cause some irritation to the husband, so that even the servants were able to perceive his annoyance. ⁴⁹Such was the third person who was one of the family when the catastrophe occurred.

⁵⁰As to the other denizens of the old building, it will suffice out of a large household to mention the prim, respectable, and capable Ames, and Mrs. Allen, a buxom and cheerful person, who relieved the lady of some of her household cares. ⁵¹The other six servants in the house bear no relation to the events of the night of January 6th.

⁵²It was at eleven forty-five that the first alarm reached the small local police station, in charge of Sergeant Wilson of the Sussex Constabulary. ⁵³Cecil Barker, much excited, had rushed up to the door and pealed furiously upon the bell. ⁵⁴A terrible tragedy had occurred at the Manor House, and John Douglas had been murdered. ⁵⁵That was the breathless burden of his message. ⁵⁶He had hurried back to the house, followed within a few minutes by the police sergeant, who arrived at the scene of the crime a little after twelve o'clock, after taking prompt steps to warn the county authorities that something serious was afoot.

⁵⁷On reaching the Manor House, the sergeant had found the drawbridge down, the windows lighted up, and the whole household in a state of wild confusion and alarm. ⁵⁸The white-faced servants were huddling together in the hall, with the frightened butler wringing his hands in the doorway. ⁵⁹Only Cecil Barker seemed to be master of himself and his emotions; he had opened the door which was nearest to the entrance and he had beckoned to the sergeant to follow him. ⁶⁰At that moment there arrived Dr. Wood, a brisk and capable general practitioner from the village. ⁶¹The three men entered the fatal room together, while the horror-stricken butler followed at their heels, closing the door behind him to shut out the terrible scene from the maid servants.

⁶²The dead man lay on his back, sprawling with outstretched limbs in the centre of the room. ⁶³He was clad only in a pink dressing gown, which covered his night clothes. ⁶⁴There were carpet slippers on his bare feet. ⁶⁵The doctor knelt beside him and held down the hand lamp which had stood on the table. ⁶⁶One glance at the victim was enough to show the healer that his presence could be dispensed with. ⁶⁷The man had been horribly injured. ⁶⁸Lying across his chest was a curious weapon, a shotgun with the barrel sawed off a foot in front of the triggers. ⁶⁹It was clear that this had been fired at close range and that he had received the whole charge in the face, blowing his head almost to pieces. ⁷⁰The triggers had been wired together, so as to make the simultaneous discharge more destructive.

⁷¹The country policeman was unnerved and troubled by the tremendous responsibility which had come so suddenly upon him. ⁷²"We will touch nothing until my superiors arrive," he said in a hushed voice, staring in horror at the dreadful head.

⁷³"Nothing has been touched up to now," said Cecil Barker. ⁷⁴"I'll answer for that." ⁷⁵You see it all exactly as I found it."

⁷⁶"When was that?" ⁷⁷The sergeant had drawn out his notebook.

⁷⁸"It was just half-past eleven. ⁷⁹I had not begun to undress, and I was sitting by the fire in my bedroom when I heard the report. ⁸⁰It was not very loud—it seemed to be muffled. ⁸¹I rushed down—I don't suppose it was thirty seconds before I was in the room."

⁸²"Was the door open?"

⁸³"Yes, it was open. ⁸⁴Poor Douglas was lying as you see him. ⁸⁵His bedroom candle was burning on the table. ⁸⁶It was I who lit the lamp some minutes afterward."

⁸⁷"Did you see no one?"

⁸⁸"No. ⁸⁹I heard Mrs. Douglas coming down the stair behind me, and I rushed out to prevent her from seeing this dreadful sight. ⁹⁰Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, came and took her away. ⁹¹Ames had arrived, and we ran back into the room once more."

⁹²"But surely I have heard that the drawbridge is kept up all night."

⁹³"Yes, it was up until I lowered it."

⁹⁴"Then how could any murderer have got away? ⁹⁵It is out of the question! ⁹⁶Mr. Douglas must have shot himself."

⁹⁷“That was our first idea. ⁹⁸But see!” ⁹⁹Barker drew aside the curtain, and showed that the long, diamond-paned window was open to its full extent. ¹⁰⁰“And look at this!” ¹⁰¹He held the lamp down and illuminated a smudge of blood like the mark of a boot-sole upon the wooden sill. ¹⁰²“Someone has stood there in getting out.”

¹⁰³“You mean that someone waded across the moat?”

¹⁰⁴“Exactly!”

¹⁰⁵“Then if you were in the room within half a minute of the crime, he must have been in the water at that very moment.”

¹⁰⁶“I have not a doubt of it. ¹⁰⁷I wish to heaven that I had rushed to the window! ¹⁰⁸But the curtain screened it, as you can see, and so it never occurred to me. ¹⁰⁹Then I heard the step of Mrs. Douglas, and I could not let her enter the room. ¹¹⁰It would have been too horrible.”

¹¹¹“Horrible enough!” said the doctor, looking at the shattered head and the terrible marks which surrounded it. ¹¹²“I’ve never seen such injuries since the Birlstone railway smash.”

¹¹³“But, I say,” remarked the police sergeant, whose slow, bucolic common sense was still pondering the open window. ¹¹⁴“It’s all very well your saying that a man escaped by wading this moat, but what I ask you is, how did he ever get into the house at all if the bridge was up?”

¹¹⁵“Ah, that’s the question,” said Barker.

¹¹⁶“At what o’clock was it raised?”

¹¹⁷“It was nearly six o’clock,” said Ames, the butler.

¹¹⁸“I’ve heard,” said the sergeant, “that it was usually raised at sunset. ¹¹⁹That would be nearer half-past four than six at this time of year.”

¹²⁰“Mrs. Douglas had visitors to tea,” said Ames. ¹²¹“I couldn’t raise it until they went. ¹²²Then I wound it up myself.”

¹²³“Then it comes to this,” said the sergeant: ¹²⁴“If anyone came from outside—if they did—they must have got in across the bridge before six and been in hiding ever since, until Mr. Douglas came into the room after eleven.”

¹²⁵“That is so! ¹²⁶Mr. Douglas went round the house every night the last thing before he turned in to see that the lights were right. ¹²⁷That brought him in here. ¹²⁸The man was waiting and shot him. ¹²⁹Then he got away through the window and left his gun behind him. ¹³⁰That’s how I read it; for nothing else will fit the facts.”

¹³¹The sergeant picked up a card which lay beside the dead man on the floor. ¹³²The initials V. V. and under them the number 341 were rudely scrawled in ink upon it.

¹³³“What’s this?” he asked, holding it up.

¹³⁴Barker looked at it with curiosity. ¹³⁵“I never noticed it before,” he said. ¹³⁶“The murderer must have left it behind him.”

¹³⁷“V. V.—341. ¹³⁸I can make no sense of that.”

¹³⁹The sergeant kept turning it over in his big fingers. ¹⁴⁰“What’s V. V.? ¹⁴¹Somebody’s initials, maybe.

¹⁴²What have you got there, Dr. Wood?”

¹⁴³It was a good-sized hammer which had been lying on the rug in front of the fireplace—a substantial, workmanlike hammer. ¹⁴⁴Cecil Barker pointed to a box of brass-headed nails upon the mantelpiece.

¹⁴⁵“Mr. Douglas was altering the pictures yesterday,” he said. ¹⁴⁶“I saw him myself, standing upon that chair and fixing the big picture above it. ¹⁴⁷That accounts for the hammer.”

¹⁴⁸“We'd best put it back on the rug where we found it,” said the sergeant, scratching his puzzled head in his perplexity. ¹⁴⁹“It will want the best brains in the force to get to the bottom of this thing. ¹⁵⁰It will be a London job before it is finished.” ¹⁵¹He raised the hand lamp and walked slowly round the room. ¹⁵²“Hullo!” he cried, excitedly, drawing the window curtain to one side. ¹⁵³“What o'clock were those curtains drawn?”

¹⁵⁴“When the lamps were lit,” said the butler. ¹⁵⁵“It would be shortly after four.”

¹⁵⁶“Someone had been hiding here, sure enough.” ¹⁵⁷He held down the light, and the marks of muddy boots were very visible in the corner. ¹⁵⁸“I'm bound to say this bears out your theory, Mr. Barker. ¹⁵⁹It looks as if the man got into the house after four when the curtains were drawn and before six when the bridge was raised. ¹⁶⁰He slipped into this room, because it was the first that he saw. ¹⁶¹There was no other place where he could hide, so he popped in behind this curtain. ¹⁶²That all seems clear enough. ¹⁶³It is likely that his main idea was to burgle the house; but Mr. Douglas chanced to come upon him, so he murdered him and escaped.”

¹⁶⁴“That's how I read it,” said Barker. ¹⁶⁵“But, I say, aren't we wasting precious time? ¹⁶⁶Couldn't we start out and scour the country before the fellow gets away?”

¹⁶⁷The sergeant considered for a moment.

¹⁶⁸“There are no trains before six in the morning; so he can't get away by rail. ¹⁶⁹If he goes by road with his legs all dripping, it's odds that someone will notice him. ¹⁷⁰Anyhow, I can't leave here myself until I am relieved. ¹⁷¹But I think none of you should go until we see more clearly how we all stand.”

¹⁷²The doctor had taken the lamp and was narrowly scrutinizing the body. ¹⁷³“What's this mark?” he asked. ¹⁷⁴“Could this have any connection with the crime?”

¹⁷⁵The dead man's right arm was thrust out from his dressing gown, and exposed as high as the elbow. ¹⁷⁶About halfway up the forearm was a curious brown design, a triangle inside a circle, standing out in vivid relief upon the lard-coloured skin.

¹⁷⁷“It's not tattooed,” said the doctor, peering through his glasses. ¹⁷⁸“I never saw anything like it. ¹⁷⁹The man has been branded at some time as they brand cattle. ¹⁸⁰What is the meaning of this?”

¹⁸¹“I don't profess to know the meaning of it,” said Cecil Barker; “but I have seen the mark on Douglas many times this last ten years.”

¹⁸²“And so have I,” said the butler. ¹⁸³“Many a time when the master has rolled up his sleeves I have noticed that very mark. ¹⁸⁴I've often wondered what it could be.”

¹⁸⁵“Then it has nothing to do with the crime, anyhow,” said the sergeant. ¹⁸⁶“But it's a rum thing all the same. ¹⁸⁷Everything about this case is rum. ¹⁸⁸Well, what is it now?”

¹⁸⁹The butler had given an exclamation of astonishment and was pointing at the dead man's outstretched hand.

¹⁹⁰“They've taken his wedding ring!” he gasped.

¹⁹¹“What!”

¹⁹²“Yes, indeed. ¹⁹³Master always wore his plain gold wedding ring on the little finger of his left hand.

¹⁹⁴That ring with the rough nugget on it was above it, and the twisted snake ring on the third finger.

¹⁹⁵There's the nugget and there's the snake, but the wedding ring is gone.”

¹⁹⁶“He's right,” said Barker.

¹⁹⁷“Do you tell me,” said the sergeant, “that the wedding ring was below the other?”

¹⁹⁸“Always!”

¹⁹⁹“Then the murderer, or whoever it was, first took off this ring you call the nugget ring, then the wedding ring, and afterwards put the nugget ring back again.”

²⁰⁰“That is so!”

²⁰¹The worthy country policeman shook his head. ²⁰²“Seems to me the sooner we get London on to this case the better,” said he. ²⁰³“White Mason is a smart man. ²⁰⁴No local job has ever been too much for White Mason. ²⁰⁵It won't be long now before he is here to help us. ²⁰⁶But I expect we'll have to look to London before we are through. ²⁰⁷Anyhow, I'm not ashamed to say that it is a deal too thick for the likes of me.”

Chapter IV.

Darkness

¹At three in the morning the chief Sussex detective, obeying the urgent call from Sergeant Wilson of Birlstone, arrived from headquarters in a light dog-cart behind a breathless trotter. ²By the five-forty train in the morning he had sent his message to Scotland Yard, and he was at the Birlstone station at twelve o'clock to welcome us. ³White Mason was a quiet, comfortable-looking person in a loose tweed suit, with a clean-shaved, ruddy face, a stoutish body, and powerful bandy legs adorned with gaiters, looking like a small farmer, a retired gamekeeper, or anything upon earth except a very favourable specimen of the provincial criminal officer.

⁴"A real downright snorter, Mr. MacDonald!" he kept repeating. ⁵"We'll have the pressmen down like flies when they understand it. ⁶I'm hoping we will get our work done before they get poking their noses into it and messing up all the trails. ⁷There has been nothing like this that I can remember. ⁸There are some bits that will come home to you, Mr. Holmes, or I am mistaken. ⁹And you also, Dr. Watson; for the medicos will have a word to say before we finish. ¹⁰Your room is at the Westville Arms. ¹¹There's no other place; but I hear that it is clean and good. ¹²The man will carry your bags. ¹³This way, gentlemen, if you please."

¹⁴He was a very bustling and genial person, this Sussex detective. ¹⁵In ten minutes we had all found our quarters. ¹⁶In ten more we were seated in the parlour of the inn and being treated to a rapid sketch of those events which have been outlined in the previous chapter. ¹⁷MacDonald made an occasional note, while Holmes sat absorbed, with the expression of surprised and reverent admiration with which the botanist surveys the rare and precious bloom.

¹⁸"Remarkable!" he said, when the story was unfolded, "most remarkable! ¹⁹I can hardly recall any case where the features have been more peculiar."

²⁰"I thought you would say so, Mr. Holmes," said White Mason in great delight. ²¹"We're well up with the times in Sussex. ²²I've told you now how matters were, up to the time when I took over from Sergeant Wilson between three and four this morning. ²³My word! ²⁴I made the old mare go! ²⁵But I need not have been in such a hurry, as it turned out; for there was nothing immediate that I could do. ²⁶Sergeant Wilson had all the facts. ²⁷I checked them and considered them and maybe added a few of my own."

²⁸"What were they?" asked Holmes eagerly.

²⁹"Well, I first had the hammer examined. ³⁰There was Dr. Wood there to help me. ³¹We found no signs of violence upon it. ³²I was hoping that if Mr. Douglas defended himself with the hammer, he might have left his mark upon the murderer before he dropped it on the mat. ³³But there was no stain."

³⁴"That, of course, proves nothing at all," remarked Inspector MacDonald. ³⁵"There has been many a hammer murder and no trace on the hammer."

³⁶"Quite so. ³⁷It doesn't prove it wasn't used. ³⁸But there might have been stains, and that would have helped us. ³⁹As a matter of fact there were none. ⁴⁰Then I examined the gun. ⁴¹They were buckshot cartridges, and, as Sergeant Wilson pointed out, the triggers were wired together so that, if you pulled on the hinder one, both barrels were discharged. ⁴²Whoever fixed that up had made up his mind that he was going to take no chances of missing his man. ⁴³The sawed gun was not more than two foot long—one could carry it easily under one's coat. ⁴⁴There was no complete maker's name; but the printed letters P-E-N were on the fluting between the barrels, and the rest of the name had been cut off by the saw."

⁴⁵"A big P with a flourish above it, E and N smaller?" asked Holmes.

⁴⁶“Exactly.”

⁴⁷“Pennsylvania Small Arms Company—well-known American firm,” said Holmes.

⁴⁸White Mason gazed at my friend as the little village practitioner looks at the Harley Street specialist who by a word can solve the difficulties that perplex him.

⁴⁹“That is very helpful, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁰No doubt you are right. ⁵¹Wonderful! ⁵²Wonderful! ⁵³Do you carry the names of all the gun makers in the world in your memory?”

⁵⁴Holmes dismissed the subject with a wave.

⁵⁵“No doubt it is an American shotgun,” White Mason continued. ⁵⁶“I seem to have read that a sawed-off shotgun is a weapon used in some parts of America. ⁵⁷Apart from the name upon the barrel, the idea had occurred to me. ⁵⁸There is some evidence then, that this man who entered the house and killed its master was an American.”

⁵⁹MacDonald shook his head. ⁶⁰“Man, you are surely travelling overfast,” said he. ⁶¹“I have heard no evidence yet that any stranger was ever in the house at all.”

⁶²“The open window, the blood on the sill, the queer card, the marks of boots in the corner, the gun!”

⁶³“Nothing there that could not have been arranged. ⁶⁴Mr. Douglas was an American, or had lived long in America. ⁶⁵So had Mr. Barker. ⁶⁶You don't need to import an American from outside in order to account for American doings.”

⁶⁷“Ames, the butler—”

⁶⁸“What about him? ⁶⁹Is he reliable?”

⁷⁰“Ten years with Sir Charles Chandos—as solid as a rock. ⁷¹He has been with Douglas ever since he took the Manor House five years ago. ⁷²He has never seen a gun of this sort in the house.”

⁷³“The gun was made to conceal. ⁷⁴That's why the barrels were sawed. ⁷⁵It would fit into any box. ⁷⁶How could he swear there was no such gun in the house?”

⁷⁷“Well, anyhow, he had never seen one.”

⁷⁸MacDonald shook his obstinate Scotch head. ⁷⁹“I'm not convinced yet that there was ever anyone in the house,” said he. ⁸⁰“I'm asking you to conseedar” (his accent became more Aberdonian as he lost himself in his argument) ⁸¹“I'm asking you to conseedar what it involves if you suppose that this gun was ever brought into the house, and that all these strange things were done by a person from outside. ⁸²Oh, man, it's just inconceivable! ⁸³It's clean against common sense! ⁸⁴I put it to you, Mr. Holmes, judging it by what we have heard.”

⁸⁵“Well, state your case, Mr. Mac,” said Holmes in his most judicial style.

⁸⁶“The man is not a burglar, supposing that he ever existed. ⁸⁷The ring business and the card point to premeditated murder for some private reason. ⁸⁸Very good. ⁸⁹Here is a man who slips into a house with the deliberate intention of committing murder. ⁹⁰He knows, if he knows anything, that he will have a deeficulty in making his escape, as the house is surrounded with water. ⁹¹What weapon would he choose? ⁹²You would say the most silent in the world. ⁹³Then he could hope when the deed was done to slip quickly from the window, to wade the moat, and to get away at his leisure. ⁹⁴That's understandable. ⁹⁵But is it understandable that he should go out of his way to bring with him the most noisy weapon he could select, knowing well that it will fetch every human being in the house to the spot as quick as they can run, and that it is all odds that he will be seen before he can get across the moat? ⁹⁶Is that credible, Mr. Holmes?”

⁹⁷“Well, you put the case strongly,” my friend replied thoughtfully. ⁹⁸“It certainly needs a good deal of justification. ⁹⁹May I ask, Mr. White Mason, whether you examined the farther side of the moat at once to see if there were any signs of the man having climbed out from the water?”

¹⁰⁰“There were no signs, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁰¹But it is a stone ledge, and one could hardly expect them.”

¹⁰²“No tracks or marks?”

¹⁰³“None.”

¹⁰⁴“Ha! ¹⁰⁵Would there be any objection, Mr. White Mason, to our going down to the house at once?

¹⁰⁶There may possibly be some small point which might be suggestive.”

¹⁰⁷“I was going to propose it, Mr. Holmes; but I thought it well to put you in touch with all the facts before we go. ¹⁰⁸I suppose if anything should strike you—” ¹⁰⁹White Mason looked doubtfully at the amateur.

¹¹⁰“I have worked with Mr. Holmes before,” said Inspector MacDonald. ¹¹¹“He plays the game.”

¹¹²“My own idea of the game, at any rate,” said Holmes, with a smile. ¹¹³“I go into a case to help the ends of justice and the work of the police. ¹¹⁴If I have ever separated myself from the official force, it is because they have first separated themselves from me. ¹¹⁵I have no wish ever to score at their expense. ¹¹⁶At the same time, Mr. White Mason, I claim the right to work in my own way and give my results at my own time—complete rather than in stages.”

¹¹⁷“I am sure we are honoured by your presence and to show you all we know,” said White Mason cordially. ¹¹⁸“Come along, Dr. Watson, and when the time comes we'll all hope for a place in your book.”

¹¹⁹We walked down the quaint village street with a row of pollarded elms on each side of it. ¹²⁰Just beyond were two ancient stone pillars, weather-stained and lichen-blotched bearing upon their summits a shapeless something which had once been the rampant lion of Capus of Birlstone. ¹²¹A short walk along the winding drive with such sward and oaks around it as one only sees in rural England, then a sudden turn, and the long, low Jacobean house of dingy, liver-coloured brick lay before us, with an old-fashioned garden of cut yews on each side of it. ¹²²As we approached it, there was the wooden drawbridge and the beautiful broad moat as still and luminous as quicksilver in the cold, winter sunshine.

¹²³Three centuries had flowed past the old Manor House, centuries of births and of homecomings, of country dances and of the meetings of fox hunters. ¹²⁴Strange that now in its old age this dark business should have cast its shadow upon the venerable walls! ¹²⁵And yet those strange, peaked roofs and quaint, overhung gables were a fitting covering to grim and terrible intrigue. ¹²⁶As I looked at the deep-set windows and the long sweep of the dull-coloured, water-lapped front, I felt that no more fitting scene could be set for such a tragedy.

¹²⁷“That's the window,” said White Mason, “that one on the immediate right of the drawbridge. ¹²⁸It's open just as it was found last night.”

¹²⁹“It looks rather narrow for a man to pass.”

¹³⁰“Well, it wasn't a fat man, anyhow. ¹³¹We don't need your deductions, Mr. Holmes, to tell us that.

¹³²But you or I could squeeze through all right.”

¹³³Holmes walked to the edge of the moat and looked across. ¹³⁴Then he examined the stone ledge and the grass border beyond it.

¹³⁵“I’ve had a good look, Mr. Holmes,” said White Mason. ¹³⁶“There is nothing there, no sign that anyone has landed—but why should he leave any sign?”

¹³⁷“Exactly. ¹³⁸Why should he? ¹³⁹Is the water always turbid?”

¹⁴⁰“Generally about this colour. ¹⁴¹The stream brings down the clay.”

¹⁴²“How deep is it?”

¹⁴³“About two feet at each side and three in the middle.”

¹⁴⁴“So we can put aside all idea of the man having been drowned in crossing.”

¹⁴⁵“No, a child could not be drowned in it.”

¹⁴⁶We walked across the drawbridge, and were admitted by a quaint, gnarled, dried-up person, who was the butler, Ames. ¹⁴⁷The poor old fellow was white and quivering from the shock. ¹⁴⁸The village sergeant, a tall, formal, melancholy man, still held his vigil in the room of Fate. ¹⁴⁹The doctor had departed.

¹⁵⁰“Anything fresh, Sergeant Wilson?” asked White Mason.

¹⁵¹“No, sir.”

¹⁵²“Then you can go home. ¹⁵³You’ve had enough. ¹⁵⁴We can send for you if we want you. ¹⁵⁵The butler had better wait outside. ¹⁵⁶Tell him to warn Mr. Cecil Barker, Mrs. Douglas, and the housekeeper that we may want a word with them presently. ¹⁵⁷Now, gentlemen, perhaps you will allow me to give you the views I have formed first, and then you will be able to arrive at your own.”

¹⁵⁸He impressed me, this country specialist. ¹⁵⁹He had a solid grip of fact and a cool, clear, common-sense brain, which should take him some way in his profession. ¹⁶⁰Holmes listened to him intently, with no sign of that impatience which the official exponent too often produced.

¹⁶¹“Is it suicide, or is it murder—that’s our first question, gentlemen, is it not? ¹⁶²If it were suicide, then we have to believe that this man began by taking off his wedding ring and concealing it; that he then came down here in his dressing gown, trampled mud into a corner behind the curtain in order to give the idea someone had waited for him, opened the window, put blood on the—”

¹⁶³“We can surely dismiss that,” said MacDonald.

¹⁶⁴“So I think. ¹⁶⁵Suicide is out of the question. ¹⁶⁶Then a murder has been done. ¹⁶⁷What we have to determine is, whether it was done by someone outside or inside the house.”

¹⁶⁸“Well, let’s hear the argument.”

¹⁶⁹“There are considerable difficulties both ways, and yet one or the other it must be. ¹⁷⁰We will suppose first that some person or persons inside the house did the crime. ¹⁷¹They got this man down here at a time when everything was still and yet no one was asleep. ¹⁷²They then did the deed with the queerest and noisiest weapon in the world so as to tell everyone what had happened—a weapon that was never seen in the house before. ¹⁷³That does not seem a very likely start, does it?”

¹⁷⁴“No, it does not.”

¹⁷⁵“Well, then, everyone is agreed that after the alarm was given only a minute at the most had passed before the whole household—not Mr. Cecil Barker alone, though he claims to have been the first, but Ames and all of them were on the spot. ¹⁷⁶Do you tell me that in that time the guilty person managed to make footmarks in the corner, open the window, mark the sill with blood, take the wedding ring off the dead man’s finger, and all the rest of it? ¹⁷⁷It’s impossible!”

¹⁷⁸“You put it very clearly,” said Holmes. ¹⁷⁹“I am inclined to agree with you.”

¹⁸⁰“Well, then, we are driven back to the theory that it was done by someone from outside. ¹⁸¹We are still faced with some big difficulties; but anyhow they have ceased to be impossibilities. ¹⁸²The man got into the house between four-thirty and six; that is to say, between dusk and the time when the bridge was raised. ¹⁸³There had been some visitors, and the door was open; so there was nothing to prevent him. ¹⁸⁴He may have been a common burglar, or he may have had some private grudge against Mr. Douglas. ¹⁸⁵Since Mr. Douglas has spent most of his life in America, and this shotgun seems to be an American weapon, it would seem that the private grudge is the more likely theory. ¹⁸⁶He slipped into this room because it was the first he came to, and he hid behind the curtain. ¹⁸⁷There he remained until past eleven at night. ¹⁸⁸At that time Mr. Douglas entered the room. ¹⁸⁹It was a short interview, if there were any interview at all; for Mrs. Douglas declares that her husband had not left her more than a few minutes when she heard the shot.”

¹⁹⁰“The candle shows that,” said Holmes.

¹⁹¹“Exactly. ¹⁹²The candle, which was a new one, is not burned more than half an inch. ¹⁹³He must have placed it on the table before he was attacked; otherwise, of course, it would have fallen when he fell. ¹⁹⁴This shows that he was not attacked the instant that he entered the room. ¹⁹⁵When Mr. Barker arrived the candle was lit and the lamp was out.”

¹⁹⁶“That's all clear enough.”

¹⁹⁷“Well, now, we can reconstruct things on those lines. ¹⁹⁸Mr. Douglas enters the room. ¹⁹⁹He puts down the candle. ²⁰⁰A man appears from behind the curtain. ²⁰¹He is armed with this gun. ²⁰²He demands the wedding ring— ²⁰³Heaven only knows why, but so it must have been. ²⁰⁴Mr. Douglas gave it up. ²⁰⁵Then either in cold blood or in the course of a struggle—Douglas may have gripped the hammer that was found upon the mat—he shot Douglas in this horrible way. ²⁰⁶He dropped his gun and also it would seem this queer card—V. V. 341, whatever that may mean—and he made his escape through the window and across the moat at the very moment when Cecil Barker was discovering the crime. ²⁰⁷How's that, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁰⁸“Very interesting, but just a little unconvincing.”

²⁰⁹“Man, it would be absolute nonsense if it wasn't that anything else is even worse!” cried MacDonald. ²¹⁰“Somebody killed the man, and whoever it was I could clearly prove to you that he should have done it some other way. ²¹¹What does he mean by allowing his retreat to be cut off like that? ²¹²What does he mean by using a shotgun when silence was his one chance of escape? ²¹³Come, Mr. Holmes, it's up to you to give us a lead, since you say Mr. White Mason's theory is unconvincing.”

²¹⁴Holmes had sat intently observant during this long discussion, missing no word that was said, with his keen eyes darting to right and to left, and his forehead wrinkled with speculation.

²¹⁵“I should like a few more facts before I get so far as a theory, Mr. Mac,” said he, kneeling down beside the body. ²¹⁶“Dear me! these injuries are really appalling. ²¹⁷Can we have the butler in for a moment? ... ²¹⁸Ames, I understand that you have often seen this very unusual mark—a branded triangle inside a circle—upon Mr. Douglas's forearm?”

²¹⁹“Frequently, sir.”

²²⁰“You never heard any speculation as to what it meant?”

²²¹“No, sir.”

²²²“It must have caused great pain when it was inflicted. ²²³It is undoubtedly a burn. ²²⁴Now, I observe, Ames, that there is a small piece of plaster at the angle of Mr. Douglas's jaw. ²²⁵Did you observe that in life?”

²²⁶“Yes, sir, he cut himself in shaving yesterday morning.”

²²⁷“Did you ever know him to cut himself in shaving before?”

²²⁸“Not for a very long time, sir.”

²²⁹“Suggestive!” said Holmes. ²³⁰“It may, of course, be a mere coincidence, or it may point to some nervousness which would indicate that he had reason to apprehend danger. ²³¹Had you noticed anything unusual in his conduct, yesterday, Ames?”

²³²“It struck me that he was a little restless and excited, sir.”

²³³“Ha! ²³⁴The attack may not have been entirely unexpected. ²³⁵We do seem to make a little progress, do we not? ²³⁶Perhaps you would rather do the questioning, Mr. Mac?”

²³⁷“No, Mr. Holmes, it's in better hands than mine.”

²³⁸“Well, then, we will pass to this card—V. V. 341. ²³⁹It is rough cardboard. ²⁴⁰Have you any of the sort in the house?”

²⁴¹“I don't think so.”

²⁴²Holmes walked across to the desk and dabbed a little ink from each bottle on to the blotting paper. ²⁴³“It was not printed in this room,” he said; “this is black ink and the other purplish. ²⁴⁴It was done by a thick pen, and these are fine. ²⁴⁵No, it was done elsewhere, I should say. ²⁴⁶Can you make anything of the inscription, Ames?”

²⁴⁷“No, sir, nothing.”

²⁴⁸“What do you think, Mr. Mac?”

²⁴⁹“It gives me the impression of a secret society of some sort; the same with his badge upon the forearm.”

²⁵⁰“That's my idea, too,” said White Mason.

²⁵¹“Well, we can adopt it as a working hypothesis and then see how far our difficulties disappear. ²⁵²An agent from such a society makes his way into the house, waits for Mr. Douglas, blows his head nearly off with this weapon, and escapes by wading the moat, after leaving a card beside the dead man, which will when mentioned in the papers, tell other members of the society that vengeance has been done. ²⁵³That all hangs together. ²⁵⁴But why this gun, of all weapons?”

²⁵⁵“Exactly.”

²⁵⁶“And why the missing ring?”

²⁵⁷“Quite so.”

²⁵⁸“And why no arrest? ²⁵⁹It's past two now. ²⁶⁰I take it for granted that since dawn every constable within forty miles has been looking out for a wet stranger?”

²⁶¹“That is so, Mr. Holmes.”

²⁶²“Well, unless he has a burrow close by or a change of clothes ready, they can hardly miss him. ²⁶³And yet they have missed him up to now!” ²⁶⁴Holmes had gone to the window and was examining with his

lens the blood mark on the sill. ²⁶⁵“It is clearly the tread of a shoe. ²⁶⁶It is remarkably broad; a splay-foot, one would say. ²⁶⁷Curious, because, so far as one can trace any footmark in this mud-stained corner, one would say it was a more shapely sole. ²⁶⁸However, they are certainly very indistinct. ²⁶⁹What's this under the side table?”

²⁷⁰“Mr. Douglas's dumb-bells,” said Ames.

²⁷¹“Dumb-bell—there's only one. ²⁷²Where's the other?”

²⁷³“I don't know, Mr. Holmes. ²⁷⁴There may have been only one. ²⁷⁵I have not noticed them for months.”

²⁷⁶“One dumb-bell—” Holmes said seriously; but his remarks were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door.

²⁷⁷A tall, sunburned, capable-looking, clean-shaved man looked in at us. ²⁷⁸I had no difficulty in guessing that it was the Cecil Barker of whom I had heard. ²⁷⁹His masterful eyes travelled quickly with a questioning glance from face to face.

²⁸⁰“Sorry to interrupt your consultation,” said he, “but you should hear the latest news.”

²⁸¹“An arrest?”

²⁸²“No such luck. ²⁸³But they've found his bicycle. ²⁸⁴The fellow left his bicycle behind him. ²⁸⁵Come and have a look. ²⁸⁶It is within a hundred yards of the hall door.”

²⁸⁷We found three or four grooms and idlers standing in the drive inspecting a bicycle which had been drawn out from a clump of evergreens in which it had been concealed. ²⁸⁸It was a well used Rudge-Whitworth, splashed as from a considerable journey. ²⁸⁹There was a saddlebag with spanner and oilcan, but no clue as to the owner.

²⁹⁰“It would be a grand help to the police,” said the inspector, “if these things were numbered and registered. ²⁹¹But we must be thankful for what we've got. ²⁹²If we can't find where he went to, at least we are likely to get where he came from. ²⁹³But what in the name of all that is wonderful made the fellow leave it behind? ²⁹⁴And how in the world has he got away without it? ²⁹⁵We don't seem to get a gleam of light in the case, Mr. Holmes.”

²⁹⁶“Don't we?” my friend answered thoughtfully. ²⁹⁷“I wonder!”

Chapter V.

The People Of the Drama

¹“Have you seen all you want of the study?” asked White Mason as we reentered the house.

²“For the time,” said the inspector, and Holmes nodded.

³“Then perhaps you would now like to hear the evidence of some of the people in the house. ⁴We could use the dining-room, Ames. ⁵Please come yourself first and tell us what you know.”

⁶The butler's account was a simple and a clear one, and he gave a convincing impression of sincerity. ⁷He had been engaged five years before, when Douglas first came to Birlstone. ⁸He understood that Mr. Douglas was a rich gentleman who had made his money in America. ⁹He had been a kind and considerate employer—not quite what Ames was used to, perhaps; but one can't have everything. ¹⁰He never saw any signs of apprehension in Mr. Douglas: on the contrary, he was the most fearless man he had ever known. ¹¹He ordered the drawbridge to be pulled up every night because it was the ancient custom of the old house, and he liked to keep the old ways up.

¹²Mr. Douglas seldom went to London or left the village; but on the day before the crime he had been shopping at Tunbridge Wells. ¹³He (Ames) had observed some restlessness and excitement on the part of Mr. Douglas that day; for he had seemed impatient and irritable, which was unusual with him. ¹⁴He had not gone to bed that night; but was in the pantry at the back of the house, putting away the silver, when he heard the bell ring violently. ¹⁵He heard no shot; but it was hardly possible he would, as the pantry and kitchens were at the very back of the house and there were several closed doors and a long passage between. ¹⁶The housekeeper had come out of her room, attracted by the violent ringing of the bell. ¹⁷They had gone to the front of the house together.

¹⁸As they reached the bottom of the stair he had seen Mrs. Douglas coming down it. ¹⁹No, she was not hurrying; it did not seem to him that she was particularly agitated. ²⁰Just as she reached the bottom of the stair Mr. Barker had rushed out of the study. ²¹He had stopped Mrs. Douglas and begged her to go back.

²²“For God's sake, go back to your room!” he cried. ²³“Poor Jack is dead! ²⁴You can do nothing. ²⁵For God's sake, go back!”

²⁶After some persuasion upon the stairs Mrs. Douglas had gone back. ²⁷She did not scream. ²⁸She made no outcry whatever. ²⁹Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, had taken her upstairs and stayed with her in the bedroom. ³⁰Ames and Mr. Barker had then returned to the study, where they had found everything exactly as the police had seen it. ³¹The candle was not lit at that time; but the lamp was burning. ³²They had looked out of the window; but the night was very dark and nothing could be seen or heard. ³³They had then rushed out into the hall, where Ames had turned the windlass which lowered the drawbridge. ³⁴Mr. Barker had then hurried off to get the police.

³⁵Such, in its essentials, was the evidence of the butler.

³⁶The account of Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, was, so far as it went, a corroboration of that of her fellow servant. ³⁷The housekeeper's room was rather nearer to the front of the house than the pantry in which Ames had been working. ³⁸She was preparing to go to bed when the loud ringing of the bell had attracted her attention. ³⁹She was a little hard of hearing. ⁴⁰Perhaps that was why she had not heard the shot; but in any case the study was a long way off. ⁴¹She remembered hearing some sound which she imagined to be the slamming of a door. ⁴²That was a good deal earlier—half an hour at least before the ringing of the bell. ⁴³When Mr. Ames ran to the front she went with him. ⁴⁴She saw Mr. Barker, very pale and

excited, come out of the study. ⁴⁵He intercepted Mrs. Douglas, who was coming down the stairs. ⁴⁶He entreated her to go back, and she answered him, but what she said could not be heard.

⁴⁷“Take her up! ⁴⁸Stay with her!” he had said to Mrs. Allen.

⁴⁹She had therefore taken her to the bedroom, and endeavoured to soothe her. ⁵⁰She was greatly excited, trembling all over, but made no other attempt to go downstairs. ⁵¹She just sat in her dressing gown by her bedroom fire, with her head sunk in her hands. ⁵²Mrs. Allen stayed with her most of the night. ⁵³As to the other servants, they had all gone to bed, and the alarm did not reach them until just before the police arrived. ⁵⁴They slept at the extreme back of the house, and could not possibly have heard anything.

⁵⁵So far the housekeeper could add nothing on cross-examination save lamentations and expressions of amazement.

⁵⁶Cecil Barker succeeded Mrs. Allen as a witness. ⁵⁷As to the occurrences of the night before, he had very little to add to what he had already told the police. ⁵⁸Personally, he was convinced that the murderer had escaped by the window. ⁵⁹The bloodstain was conclusive, in his opinion, on that point. ⁶⁰Besides, as the bridge was up, there was no other possible way of escaping. ⁶¹He could not explain what had become of the assassin or why he had not taken his bicycle, if it were indeed his. ⁶²He could not possibly have been drowned in the moat, which was at no place more than three feet deep.

⁶³In his own mind he had a very definite theory about the murder. ⁶⁴Douglas was a reticent man, and there were some chapters in his life of which he never spoke. ⁶⁵He had emigrated to America when he was a very young man. ⁶⁶He had prospered well, and Barker had first met him in California, where they had become partners in a successful mining claim at a place called Benito Canyon. ⁶⁷They had done very well; but Douglas had suddenly sold out and started for England. ⁶⁸He was a widower at that time. ⁶⁹Barker had afterwards realized his money and come to live in London. ⁷⁰Thus they had renewed their friendship.

⁷¹Douglas had given him the impression that some danger was hanging over his head, and he had always looked upon his sudden departure from California, and also his renting a house in so quiet a place in England, as being connected with this peril. ⁷²He imagined that some secret society, some implacable organization, was on Douglas's track, which would never rest until it killed him. ⁷³Some remarks of his had given him this idea; though he had never told him what the society was, nor how he had come to offend it. ⁷⁴He could only suppose that the legend upon the placard had some reference to this secret society.

⁷⁵“How long were you with Douglas in California?” asked Inspector MacDonald.

⁷⁶“Five years altogether.”

⁷⁷“He was a bachelor, you say?”

⁷⁸“A widower.”

⁷⁹“Have you ever heard where his first wife came from?”

⁸⁰“No, I remember his saying that she was of German extraction, and I have seen her portrait. ⁸¹She was a very beautiful woman. ⁸²She died of typhoid the year before I met him.”

⁸³“You don't associate his past with any particular part of America?”

⁸⁴“I have heard him talk of Chicago. ⁸⁵He knew that city well and had worked there. ⁸⁶I have heard him talk of the coal and iron districts. ⁸⁷He had travelled a good deal in his time.”

⁸⁸“Was he a politician? ⁸⁹Had this secret society to do with politics?”

⁹⁰“No, he cared nothing about politics.”

⁹¹“You have no reason to think it was criminal?”

⁹²“On the contrary, I never met a straighter man in my life.”

⁹³“Was there anything curious about his life in California?”

⁹⁴“He liked best to stay and to work at our claim in the mountains. ⁹⁵He would never go where other men were if he could help it. ⁹⁶That's why I first thought that someone was after him. ⁹⁷Then when he left so suddenly for Europe I made sure that it was so. ⁹⁸I believe that he had a warning of some sort. ⁹⁹Within a week of his leaving half a dozen men were inquiring for him.”

¹⁰⁰“What sort of men?”

¹⁰¹“Well, they were a mighty hard-looking crowd. ¹⁰²They came up to the claim and wanted to know where he was. ¹⁰³I told them that he was gone to Europe and that I did not know where to find him. ¹⁰⁴They meant him no good—it was easy to see that.”

¹⁰⁵“Were these men Americans—Californians?”

¹⁰⁶“Well, I don't know about Californians. ¹⁰⁷They were Americans, all right. ¹⁰⁸But they were not miners. ¹⁰⁹I don't know what they were, and was very glad to see their backs.”

¹¹⁰“That was six years ago?”

¹¹¹“Nearer seven.”

¹¹²“And then you were together five years in California, so that this business dates back not less than eleven years at the least?”

¹¹³“That is so.”

¹¹⁴“It must be a very serious feud that would be kept up with such earnestness for as long as that. ¹¹⁵It would be no light thing that would give rise to it.”

¹¹⁶“I think it shadowed his whole life. ¹¹⁷It was never quite out of his mind.”

¹¹⁸“But if a man had a danger hanging over him, and knew what it was, don't you think he would turn to the police for protection?”

¹¹⁹“Maybe it was some danger that he could not be protected against. ¹²⁰There's one thing you should know. ¹²¹He always went about armed. ¹²²His revolver was never out of his pocket. ¹²³But, by bad luck, he was in his dressing gown and had left it in the bedroom last night. ¹²⁴Once the bridge was up, I guess he thought he was safe.”

¹²⁵“I should like these dates a little clearer,” said MacDonald. ¹²⁶“It is quite six years since Douglas left California. ¹²⁷You followed him next year, did you not?”

¹²⁸“That is so.”

¹²⁹“And he had been married five years. ¹³⁰You must have returned about the time of his marriage.”

¹³¹“About a month before. ¹³²I was his best man.”

¹³³“Did you know Mrs. Douglas before her marriage?”

¹³⁴“No, I did not. ¹³⁵I had been away from England for ten years.”

¹³⁶“But you have seen a good deal of her since.”

¹³⁷Barker looked sternly at the detective. ¹³⁸"I have seen a good deal of him since," he answered. ¹³⁹"If I have seen her, it is because you cannot visit a man without knowing his wife. ¹⁴⁰If you imagine there is any connection—"

¹⁴¹"I imagine nothing, Mr. Barker. ¹⁴²I am bound to make every inquiry which can bear upon the case. ¹⁴³But I mean no offense."

¹⁴⁴"Some inquiries are offensive," Barker answered angrily.

¹⁴⁵"It's only the facts that we want. ¹⁴⁶It is in your interest and everyone's interest that they should be cleared up. ¹⁴⁷Did Mr. Douglas entirely approve your friendship with his wife?"

¹⁴⁸Barker grew paler, and his great, strong hands were clasped convulsively together. ¹⁴⁹"You have no right to ask such questions!" he cried. ¹⁵⁰"What has this to do with the matter you are investigating?"

¹⁵¹"I must repeat the question."

¹⁵²"Well, I refuse to answer."

¹⁵³"You can refuse to answer; but you must be aware that your refusal is in itself an answer, for you would not refuse if you had not something to conceal."

¹⁵⁴Barker stood for a moment with his face set grimly and his strong black eyebrows drawn low in intense thought. ¹⁵⁵Then he looked up with a smile. ¹⁵⁶"Well, I guess you gentlemen are only doing your clear duty after all, and I have no right to stand in the way of it. ¹⁵⁷I'd only ask you not to worry Mrs. Douglas over this matter; for she has enough upon her just now. ¹⁵⁸I may tell you that poor Douglas had just one fault in the world, and that was his jealousy. ¹⁵⁹He was fond of me—no man could be fonder of a friend. ¹⁶⁰And he was devoted to his wife. ¹⁶¹He loved me to come here, and was forever sending for me. ¹⁶²And yet if his wife and I talked together or there seemed any sympathy between us, a kind of wave of jealousy would pass over him, and he would be off the handle and saying the wildest things in a moment. ¹⁶³More than once I've sworn off coming for that reason, and then he would write me such penitent, imploring letters that I just had to. ¹⁶⁴But you can take it from me, gentlemen, if it was my last word, that no man ever had a more loving, faithful wife—and I can say also no friend could be more loyal than I!"

¹⁶⁵It was spoken with fervour and feeling, and yet Inspector MacDonald could not dismiss the subject.

¹⁶⁶"You are aware," said he, "that the dead man's wedding ring has been taken from his finger?"

¹⁶⁷"So it appears," said Barker.

¹⁶⁸"What do you mean by 'appears'?" ¹⁶⁹You know it as a fact."

¹⁷⁰The man seemed confused and undecided. ¹⁷¹"When I said 'appears' I meant that it was conceivable that he had himself taken off the ring."

¹⁷²"The mere fact that the ring should be absent, whoever may have removed it, would suggest to anyone's mind, would it not, that the marriage and the tragedy were connected?"

¹⁷³Barker shrugged his broad shoulders. ¹⁷⁴"I can't profess to say what it means," he answered. ¹⁷⁵"But if you mean to hint that it could reflect in any way upon this lady's honour"—his eyes blazed for an instant, and then with an evident effort he got a grip upon his own emotions—"well, you are on the wrong track, that's all."

¹⁷⁶"I don't know that I've anything else to ask you at present," said MacDonald, coldly.

¹⁷⁷"There was one small point," remarked Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁷⁸"When you entered the room there was only a candle lighted on the table, was there not?"

¹⁷⁹“Yes, that was so.”

¹⁸⁰“By its light you saw that some terrible incident had occurred?”

¹⁸¹“Exactly.”

¹⁸²“You at once rang for help?”

¹⁸³“Yes.”

¹⁸⁴“And it arrived very speedily?”

¹⁸⁵“Within a minute or so.”

¹⁸⁶“And yet when they arrived they found that the candle was out and that the lamp had been lighted.

¹⁸⁷That seems very remarkable.”

¹⁸⁸Again Barker showed some signs of indecision. ¹⁸⁹“I don't see that it was remarkable, Mr. Holmes,” he answered after a pause. ¹⁹⁰“The candle threw a very bad light. ¹⁹¹My first thought was to get a better one. ¹⁹²The lamp was on the table; so I lit it.”

¹⁹³“And blew out the candle?”

¹⁹⁴“Exactly.”

¹⁹⁵Holmes asked no further question, and Barker, with a deliberate look from one to the other of us, which had, as it seemed to me, something of defiance in it, turned and left the room.

¹⁹⁶Inspector MacDonald had sent up a note to the effect that he would wait upon Mrs. Douglas in her room; but she had replied that she would meet us in the dining room. ¹⁹⁷She entered now, a tall and beautiful woman of thirty, reserved and self-possessed to a remarkable degree, very different from the tragic and distracted figure I had pictured. ¹⁹⁸It is true that her face was pale and drawn, like that of one who has endured a great shock; but her manner was composed, and the finely moulded hand which she rested upon the edge of the table was as steady as my own. ¹⁹⁹Her sad, appealing eyes travelled from one to the other of us with a curiously inquisitive expression. ²⁰⁰That questioning gaze transformed itself suddenly into abrupt speech.

²⁰¹“Have you found anything out yet?” she asked.

²⁰²Was it my imagination that there was an undertone of fear rather than of hope in the question?

²⁰³“We have taken every possible step, Mrs. Douglas,” said the inspector. ²⁰⁴“You may rest assured that nothing will be neglected.”

²⁰⁵“Spare no money,” she said in a dead, even tone. ²⁰⁶“It is my desire that every possible effort should be made.”

²⁰⁷“Perhaps you can tell us something which may throw some light upon the matter.”

²⁰⁸“I fear not; but all I know is at your service.”

²⁰⁹“We have heard from Mr. Cecil Barker that you did not actually see—that you were never in the room where the tragedy occurred?”

²¹⁰“No, he turned me back upon the stairs. ²¹¹He begged me to return to my room.”

²¹²“Quite so. ²¹³You had heard the shot, and you had at once come down.”

²¹⁴“I put on my dressing gown and then came down.”

²¹⁵“How long was it after hearing the shot that you were stopped on the stair by Mr. Barker?”

²¹⁶“It may have been a couple of minutes. ²¹⁷It is so hard to reckon time at such a moment. ²¹⁸He implored me not to go on. ²¹⁹He assured me that I could do nothing. ²²⁰Then Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, led me upstairs again. ²²¹It was all like some dreadful dream.”

²²²“Can you give us any idea how long your husband had been downstairs before you heard the shot?”

²²³“No, I cannot say. ²²⁴He went from his dressing room, and I did not hear him go. ²²⁵He did the round of the house every night, for he was nervous of fire. ²²⁶It is the only thing that I have ever known him nervous of.”

²²⁷“That is just the point which I want to come to, Mrs. Douglas. ²²⁸You have known your husband only in England, have you not?”

²²⁹“Yes, we have been married five years.”

²³⁰“Have you heard him speak of anything which occurred in America and might bring some danger upon him?”

²³¹Mrs. Douglas thought earnestly before she answered. ²³²“Yes.” she said at last, “I have always felt that there was a danger hanging over him. ²³³He refused to discuss it with me. ²³⁴It was not from want of confidence in me—there was the most complete love and confidence between us—but it was out of his desire to keep all alarm away from me. ²³⁵He thought I should brood over it if I knew all, and so he was silent.”

²³⁶“How did you know it, then?”

²³⁷Mrs. Douglas's face lit with a quick smile. ²³⁸“Can a husband ever carry about a secret all his life and a woman who loves him have no suspicion of it? ²³⁹I knew it by his refusal to talk about some episodes in his American life. ²⁴⁰I knew it by certain precautions he took. ²⁴¹I knew it by certain words he let fall. ²⁴²I knew it by the way he looked at unexpected strangers. ²⁴³I was perfectly certain that he had some powerful enemies, that he believed they were on his track, and that he was always on his guard against them. ²⁴⁴I was so sure of it that for years I have been terrified if ever he came home later than was expected.”

²⁴⁵“Might I ask,” asked Holmes, “what the words were which attracted your attention?”

²⁴⁶“The Valley of Fear,” the lady answered. ²⁴⁷“That was an expression he has used when I questioned him. ²⁴⁸I have been in the Valley of Fear. ²⁴⁹I am not out of it yet.’ — ²⁵⁰‘Are we never to get out of the Valley of Fear?’ I have asked him when I have seen him more serious than usual. ²⁵¹‘Sometimes I think that we never shall,’ he has answered.”

²⁵²“Surely you asked him what he meant by the Valley of Fear?”

²⁵³“I did; but his face would become very grave and he would shake his head. ²⁵⁴‘It is bad enough that one of us should have been in its shadow,’ he said. ²⁵⁵‘Please God it shall never fall upon you!’ ²⁵⁶It was some real valley in which he had lived and in which something terrible had occurred to him, of that I am certain; but I can tell you no more.”

²⁵⁷“And he never mentioned any names?”

²⁵⁸“Yes, he was delirious with fever once when he had his hunting accident three years ago. ²⁵⁹Then I remember that there was a name that came continually to his lips. ²⁶⁰He spoke it with anger and a sort of horror. ²⁶¹McGinty was the name—Bodymaster McGinty. ²⁶²I asked him when he recovered who Bodymaster McGinty was, and whose body he was master of. ²⁶³‘Never of mine, thank God!’ he

answered with a laugh, and that was all I could get from him. ²⁶⁴But there is a connection between Bodymaster McGinty and the Valley of Fear.”

²⁶⁵“There is one other point,” said Inspector MacDonald. ²⁶⁶“You met Mr. Douglas in a boarding house in London, did you not, and became engaged to him there? ²⁶⁷Was there any romance, anything secret or mysterious, about the wedding?”

²⁶⁸“There was romance. ²⁶⁹There is always romance. ²⁷⁰There was nothing mysterious.”

²⁷¹“He had no rival?”

²⁷²“No, I was quite free.”

²⁷³“You have heard, no doubt, that his wedding ring has been taken. ²⁷⁴Does that suggest anything to you? ²⁷⁵Suppose that some enemy of his old life had tracked him down and committed this crime, what possible reason could he have for taking his wedding ring?”

²⁷⁶For an instant I could have sworn that the faintest shadow of a smile flickered over the woman's lips.

²⁷⁷“I really cannot tell,” she answered. ²⁷⁸“It is certainly a most extraordinary thing.”

²⁷⁹“Well, we will not detain you any longer, and we are sorry to have put you to this trouble at such a time,” said the inspector. ²⁸⁰“There are some other points, no doubt; but we can refer to you as they arise.”

²⁸¹She rose, and I was again conscious of that quick, questioning glance with which she had just surveyed us. ²⁸²“What impression has my evidence made upon you?” ²⁸³The question might as well have been spoken. ²⁸⁴Then, with a bow, she swept from the room.

²⁸⁵“She's a beautiful woman—a very beautiful woman,” said MacDonald thoughtfully, after the door had closed behind her. ²⁸⁶“This man Barker has certainly been down here a good deal. ²⁸⁷He is a man who might be attractive to a woman. ²⁸⁸He admits that the dead man was jealous, and maybe he knew best himself what cause he had for jealousy. ²⁸⁹Then there's that wedding ring. ²⁹⁰You can't get past that. ²⁹¹The man who tears a wedding ring off a dead man's— ²⁹²What do you say to it, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁹³My friend had sat with his head upon his hands, sunk in the deepest thought. ²⁹⁴Now he rose and rang the bell. ²⁹⁵“Ames,” he said, when the butler entered, “where is Mr. Cecil Barker now?”

²⁹⁶“I'll see, sir.”

²⁹⁷He came back in a moment to say that Barker was in the garden.

²⁹⁸“Can you remember, Ames, what Mr. Barker had on his feet last night when you joined him in the study?”

²⁹⁹“Yes, Mr. Holmes. ³⁰⁰He had a pair of bedroom slippers. ³⁰¹I brought him his boots when he went for the police.”

³⁰²“Where are the slippers now?”

³⁰³“They are still under the chair in the hall.”

³⁰⁴“Very good, Ames. ³⁰⁵It is, of course, important for us to know which tracks may be Mr. Barker's and which from outside.”

³⁰⁶“Yes, sir. ³⁰⁷I may say that I noticed that the slippers were stained with blood—so indeed were my own.”

³⁰⁸“That is natural enough, considering the condition of the room. ³⁰⁹Very good, Ames. ³¹⁰We will ring if we want you.”

³¹¹A few minutes later we were in the study. ³¹²Holmes had brought with him the carpet slippers from the hall. ³¹³As Ames had observed, the soles of both were dark with blood.

³¹⁴“Strange!” murmured Holmes, as he stood in the light of the window and examined them minutely.

³¹⁵“Very strange indeed!”

³¹⁶Stooping with one of his quick feline pounces, he placed the slipper upon the blood mark on the sill.

³¹⁷It exactly corresponded. ³¹⁸He smiled in silence at his colleagues.

³¹⁹The inspector was transfigured with excitement. ³²⁰His native accent rattled like a stick upon railings.

³²¹“Man,” he cried, “there's not a doubt of it! ³²²Barker has just marked the window himself. ³²³It's a good deal broader than any bootmark. ³²⁴I mind that you said it was a splay-foot, and here's the explanation. ³²⁵But what's the game, Mr. Holmes—what's the game?”

³²⁶“Ay, what's the game?” my friend repeated thoughtfully.

³²⁷White Mason chuckled and rubbed his fat hands together in his professional satisfaction. ³²⁸“I said it was a snorter!” he cried. ³²⁹“And a real snorter it is!”

Chapter VI.

A Dawning Light

¹The three detectives had many matters of detail into which to inquire; so I returned alone to our modest quarters at the village inn. ²But before doing so I took a stroll in the curious old-world garden which flanked the house. ³Rows of very ancient yew trees cut into strange designs girded it round. ⁴Inside was a beautiful stretch of lawn with an old sundial in the middle, the whole effect so soothing and restful that it was welcome to my somewhat jangled nerves.

⁵In that deeply peaceful atmosphere one could forget, or remember only as some fantastic nightmare, that darkened study with the sprawling, bloodstained figure on the floor. ⁶And yet, as I strolled round it and tried to steep my soul in its gentle balm, a strange incident occurred, which brought me back to the tragedy and left a sinister impression in my mind.

⁷I have said that a decoration of yew trees circled the garden. ⁸At the end farthest from the house they thickened into a continuous hedge. ⁹On the other side of this hedge, concealed from the eyes of anyone approaching from the direction of the house, there was a stone seat. ¹⁰As I approached the spot I was aware of voices, some remark in the deep tones of a man, answered by a little ripple of feminine laughter.

¹¹An instant later I had come round the end of the hedge and my eyes lit upon Mrs. Douglas and the man Barker before they were aware of my presence. ¹²Her appearance gave me a shock. ¹³In the dining-room she had been demure and discreet. ¹⁴Now all pretense of grief had passed away from her. ¹⁵Her eyes shone with the joy of living, and her face still quivered with amusement at some remark of her companion. ¹⁶He sat forward, his hands clasped and his forearms on his knees, with an answering smile upon his bold, handsome face. ¹⁷In an instant—but it was just one instant too late—they resumed their solemn masks as my figure came into view. ¹⁸A hurried word or two passed between them, and then Barker rose and came towards me.

¹⁹“Excuse me, sir,” said he, “but am I addressing Dr. Watson?”

²⁰I bowed with a coldness which showed, I dare say, very plainly the impression which had been produced upon my mind.

²¹“We thought that it was probably you, as your friendship with Mr. Sherlock Holmes is so well known.

²²Would you mind coming over and speaking to Mrs. Douglas for one instant?”

²³I followed him with a dour face. ²⁴Very clearly I could see in my mind's eye that shattered figure on the floor. ²⁵Here within a few hours of the tragedy were his wife and his nearest friend laughing together behind a bush in the garden which had been his. ²⁶I greeted the lady with reserve. ²⁷I had grieved with her grief in the dining-room. ²⁸Now I met her appealing gaze with an unresponsive eye.

²⁹“I fear that you think me callous and hard-hearted,” said she.

³⁰I shrugged my shoulders. ³¹“It is no business of mine,” said I.

³²“Perhaps some day you will do me justice. ³³If you only realized—”

³⁴“There is no need why Dr. Watson should realize,” said Barker quickly. ³⁵“As he has himself said, it is no possible business of his.”

³⁶“Exactly,” said I, “and so I will beg leave to resume my walk.”

³⁷“One moment, Dr. Watson,” cried the woman in a pleading voice. ³⁸“There is one question which you can answer with more authority than anyone else in the world, and it may make a very great difference to me. ³⁹You know Mr. Holmes and his relations with the police better than anyone else can. ⁴⁰Supposing that a matter were brought confidentially to his knowledge, is it absolutely necessary that he should pass it on to the detectives?”

⁴¹“Yes, that's it,” said Barker eagerly. ⁴²“Is he on his own or is he entirely in with them?”

⁴³“I really don't know that I should be justified in discussing such a point.”

⁴⁴“I beg—I implore that you will, Dr. Watson! ⁴⁵I assure you that you will be helping us—helping me greatly if you will guide us on that point.”

⁴⁶There was such a ring of sincerity in the woman's voice that for the instant I forgot all about her levity and was moved only to do her will.

⁴⁷“Mr. Holmes is an independent investigator,” I said. ⁴⁸“He is his own master, and would act as his own judgment directed. ⁴⁹At the same time, he would naturally feel loyalty towards the officials who were working on the same case, and he would not conceal from them anything which would help them in bringing a criminal to justice. ⁵⁰Beyond this I can say nothing, and I would refer you to Mr. Holmes himself if you wanted fuller information.”

⁵¹So saying I raised my hat and went upon my way, leaving them still seated behind that concealing hedge. ⁵²I looked back as I rounded the far end of it, and saw that they were still talking very earnestly together, and, as they were gazing after me, it was clear that it was our interview that was the subject of their debate.

⁵³“I wish none of their confidences,” said Holmes, when I reported to him what had occurred. ⁵⁴He had spent the whole afternoon at the Manor House in consultation with his two colleagues, and returned about five with a ravenous appetite for a high tea which I had ordered for him. ⁵⁵“No confidences, Watson; for they are mighty awkward if it comes to an arrest for conspiracy and murder.”

⁵⁶“You think it will come to that?”

⁵⁷He was in his most cheerful and debonair humour. ⁵⁸“My dear Watson, when I have exterminated that fourth egg I shall be ready to put you in touch with the whole situation. ⁵⁹I don't say that we have fathomed it—far from it—but when we have traced the missing dumb-bell—”

⁶⁰“The dumb-bell!”

⁶¹“Dear me, Watson, is it possible that you have not penetrated the fact that the case hangs upon the missing dumb-bell? ⁶²Well, well, you need not be downcast; for between ourselves I don't think that either Inspector Mac or the excellent local practitioner has grasped the overwhelming importance of this incident. ⁶³One dumb-bell, Watson! ⁶⁴Consider an athlete with one dumb-bell! ⁶⁵Picture to yourself the unilateral development, the imminent danger of a spinal curvature. ⁶⁶Shocking, Watson, shocking!”

⁶⁷He sat with his mouth full of toast and his eyes sparkling with mischief, watching my intellectual entanglement. ⁶⁸The mere sight of his excellent appetite was an assurance of success, for I had very clear recollections of days and nights without a thought of food, when his baffled mind had chafed before some problem while his thin, eager features became more attenuated with the asceticism of complete mental concentration. ⁶⁹Finally he lit his pipe, and sitting in the inglenook of the old village inn he talked slowly and at random about his case, rather as one who thinks aloud than as one who makes a considered statement.

⁷⁰“A lie, Watson—a great, big, thumping, obtrusive, uncompromising lie—that's what meets us on the threshold! ⁷¹There is our starting point. ⁷²The whole story told by Barker is a lie. ⁷³But Barker's story is

corroborated by Mrs. Douglas. ⁷⁴Therefore she is lying also. ⁷⁵They are both lying, and in a conspiracy. ⁷⁶So now we have the clear problem. ⁷⁷Why are they lying, and what is the truth which they are trying so hard to conceal? ⁷⁸Let us try, Watson, you and I, if we can get behind the lie and reconstruct the truth.

⁷⁹“How do I know that they are lying? ⁸⁰Because it is a clumsy fabrication which simply could not be true. ⁸¹Consider! ⁸²According to the story given to us, the assassin had less than a minute after the murder had been committed to take that ring, which was under another ring, from the dead man's finger, to replace the other ring—a thing which he would surely never have done—and to put that singular card beside his victim. ⁸³I say that this was obviously impossible.

⁸⁴“You may argue—but I have too much respect for your judgment, Watson, to think that you will do so—that the ring may have been taken before the man was killed. ⁸⁵The fact that the candle had been lit only a short time shows that there had been no lengthy interview. ⁸⁶Was Douglas, from what we hear of his fearless character, a man who would be likely to give up his wedding ring at such short notice, or could we conceive of his giving it up at all? ⁸⁷No, no, Watson, the assassin was alone with the dead man for some time with the lamp lit. ⁸⁸Of that I have no doubt at all.

⁸⁹“But the gunshot was apparently the cause of death. ⁹⁰Therefore the shot must have been fired some time earlier than we are told. ⁹¹But there could be no mistake about such a matter as that. ⁹²We are in the presence, therefore, of a deliberate conspiracy upon the part of the two people who heard the gunshot—of the man Barker and of the woman Douglas. ⁹³When on the top of this I am able to show that the blood mark on the windowsill was deliberately placed there by Barker, in order to give a false clue to the police, you will admit that the case grows dark against him.

⁹⁴“Now we have to ask ourselves at what hour the murder actually did occur. ⁹⁵Up to half-past ten the servants were moving about the house; so it was certainly not before that time. ⁹⁶At a quarter to eleven they had all gone to their rooms with the exception of Ames, who was in the pantry. ⁹⁷I have been trying some experiments after you left us this afternoon, and I find that no noise which MacDonald can make in the study can penetrate to me in the pantry when the doors are all shut.

⁹⁸“It is otherwise, however, from the housekeeper's room. ⁹⁹It is not so far down the corridor, and from it I could vaguely hear a voice when it was very loudly raised. ¹⁰⁰The sound from a shotgun is to some extent muffled when the discharge is at very close range, as it undoubtedly was in this instance. ¹⁰¹It would not be very loud, and yet in the silence of the night it should have easily penetrated to Mrs. Allen's room. ¹⁰²She is, as she has told us, somewhat deaf; but none the less she mentioned in her evidence that she did hear something like a door slamming half an hour before the alarm was given. ¹⁰³Half an hour before the alarm was given would be a quarter to eleven. ¹⁰⁴I have no doubt that what she heard was the report of the gun, and that this was the real instant of the murder.

¹⁰⁵“If this is so, we have now to determine what Barker and Mrs. Douglas, presuming that they are not the actual murderers, could have been doing from quarter to eleven, when the sound of the shot brought them down, until quarter past eleven, when they rang the bell and summoned the servants. ¹⁰⁶What were they doing, and why did they not instantly give the alarm? ¹⁰⁷That is the question which faces us, and when it has been answered we shall surely have gone some way to solve our problem.”

¹⁰⁸“I am convinced myself,” said I, “that there is an understanding between those two people. ¹⁰⁹She must be a heartless creature to sit laughing at some jest within a few hours of her husband's murder.”

¹¹⁰“Exactly. ¹¹¹She does not shine as a wife even in her own account of what occurred. ¹¹²I am not a whole-souled admirer of womankind, as you are aware, Watson, but my experience of life has taught me that there are few wives, having any regard for their husbands, who would let any man's spoken word stand between them and that husband's dead body. ¹¹³Should I ever marry, Watson, I should hope to inspire my wife with some feeling which would prevent her from being walked off by a housekeeper when my corpse was lying within a few yards of her. ¹¹⁴It was badly stage-managed; for even the rawest

investigators must be struck by the absence of the usual feminine ululation. ¹¹⁵If there had been nothing else, this incident alone would have suggested a prearranged conspiracy to my mind.”

¹¹⁶“You think then, definitely, that Barker and Mrs. Douglas are guilty of the murder?”

¹¹⁷“There is an appalling directness about your questions, Watson,” said Holmes, shaking his pipe at me. ¹¹⁸“They come at me like bullets. ¹¹⁹If you put it that Mrs. Douglas and Barker know the truth about the murder, and are conspiring to conceal it, then I can give you a whole-souled answer. ¹²⁰I am sure they do. ¹²¹But your more deadly proposition is not so clear. ¹²²Let us for a moment consider the difficulties which stand in the way.

¹²³“We will suppose that this couple are united by the bonds of a guilty love, and that they have determined to get rid of the man who stands between them. ¹²⁴It is a large supposition; for discreet inquiry among servants and others has failed to corroborate it in any way. ¹²⁵On the contrary, there is a good deal of evidence that the Douglasses were very attached to each other.”

¹²⁶“That, I am sure, cannot be true.” said I, thinking of the beautiful smiling face in the garden.

¹²⁷“Well at least they gave that impression. ¹²⁸However, we will suppose that they are an extraordinarily astute couple, who deceive everyone upon this point, and conspire to murder the husband. ¹²⁹He happens to be a man over whose head some danger hangs—”

¹³⁰“We have only their word for that.”

¹³¹Holmes looked thoughtful. ¹³²“I see, Watson. ¹³³You are sketching out a theory by which everything they say from the beginning is false. ¹³⁴According to your idea, there was never any hidden menace, or secret society, or Valley of Fear, or Boss MacSomebody, or anything else. ¹³⁵Well, that is a good sweeping generalization. ¹³⁶Let us see what that brings us to. ¹³⁷They invent this theory to account for the crime. ¹³⁸They then play up to the idea by leaving this bicycle in the park as proof of the existence of some outsider. ¹³⁹The stain on the windowsill conveys the same idea. ¹⁴⁰So does the card on the body, which might have been prepared in the house. ¹⁴¹That all fits into your hypothesis, Watson. ¹⁴²But now we come on the nasty, angular, uncompromising bits which won't slip into their places. ¹⁴³Why a cut-off shotgun of all weapons—and an American one at that? ¹⁴⁴How could they be so sure that the sound of it would not bring someone on to them? ¹⁴⁵It's a mere chance as it is that Mrs. Allen did not start out to inquire for the slamming door. ¹⁴⁶Why did your guilty couple do all this, Watson?”

¹⁴⁷“I confess that I can't explain it.”

¹⁴⁸“Then again, if a woman and her lover conspire to murder a husband, are they going to advertise their guilt by ostentatiously removing his wedding ring after his death? ¹⁴⁹Does that strike you as very probable, Watson?”

¹⁵⁰“No, it does not.”

¹⁵¹“And once again, if the thought of leaving a bicycle concealed outside had occurred to you, would it really have seemed worth doing when the dullest detective would naturally say this is an obvious blind, as the bicycle is the first thing which the fugitive needed in order to make his escape.”

¹⁵²“I can conceive of no explanation.”

¹⁵³“And yet there should be no combination of events for which the wit of man cannot conceive an explanation. ¹⁵⁴Simply as a mental exercise, without any assertion that it is true, let me indicate a possible line of thought. ¹⁵⁵It is, I admit, mere imagination; but how often is imagination the mother of truth?

¹⁵⁶“We will suppose that there was a guilty secret, a really shameful secret in the life of this man Douglas. ¹⁵⁷This leads to his murder by someone who is, we will suppose, an avenger, someone from outside. ¹⁵⁸This avenger, for some reason which I confess I am still at a loss to explain, took the dead man's wedding ring. ¹⁵⁹The vendetta might conceivably date back to the man's first marriage, and the ring be taken for some such reason.

¹⁶⁰“Before this avenger got away, Barker and the wife had reached the room. ¹⁶¹The assassin convinced them that any attempt to arrest him would lead to the publication of some hideous scandal. ¹⁶²They were converted to this idea, and preferred to let him go. ¹⁶³For this purpose they probably lowered the bridge, which can be done quite noiselessly, and then raised it again. ¹⁶⁴He made his escape, and for some reason thought that he could do so more safely on foot than on the bicycle. ¹⁶⁵He therefore left his machine where it would not be discovered until he had got safely away. ¹⁶⁶So far we are within the bounds of possibility, are we not?”

¹⁶⁷“Well, it is possible, no doubt,” said I, with some reserve.

¹⁶⁸“We have to remember, Watson, that whatever occurred is certainly something very extraordinary. ¹⁶⁹Well, now, to continue our supposititious case, the couple—not necessarily a guilty couple—realize after the murderer is gone that they have placed themselves in a position in which it may be difficult for them to prove that they did not themselves either do the deed or connive at it. ¹⁷⁰They rapidly and rather clumsily met the situation. ¹⁷¹The mark was put by Barker's bloodstained slipper upon the window-sill to suggest how the fugitive got away. ¹⁷²They obviously were the two who must have heard the sound of the gun; so they gave the alarm exactly as they would have done, but a good half hour after the event.”

¹⁷³“And how do you propose to prove all this?”

¹⁷⁴“Well, if there were an outsider, he may be traced and taken. ¹⁷⁵That would be the most effective of all proofs. ¹⁷⁶But if not—well, the resources of science are far from being exhausted. ¹⁷⁷I think that an evening alone in that study would help me much.”

¹⁷⁸“An evening alone!”

¹⁷⁹“I propose to go up there presently. ¹⁸⁰I have arranged it with the estimable Ames, who is by no means whole-hearted about Barker. ¹⁸¹I shall sit in that room and see if its atmosphere brings me inspiration. ¹⁸²I'm a believer in the genius loci. ¹⁸³You smile, Friend Watson. ¹⁸⁴Well, we shall see. ¹⁸⁵By the way, you have that big umbrella of yours, have you not?”

¹⁸⁶“It is here.”

¹⁸⁷“Well, I'll borrow that if I may.”

¹⁸⁸“Certainly—but what a wretched weapon! ¹⁸⁹If there is danger—”

¹⁹⁰“Nothing serious, my dear Watson, or I should certainly ask for your assistance. ¹⁹¹But I'll take the umbrella. ¹⁹²At present I am only awaiting the return of our colleagues from Tunbridge Wells, where they are at present engaged in trying for a likely owner to the bicycle.”

¹⁹³It was nightfall before Inspector MacDonald and White Mason came back from their expedition, and they arrived exultant, reporting a great advance in our investigation.

¹⁹⁴“Man, I'll admeet that I had my doubts if there was ever an outsider,” said MacDonald, “but that's all past now. ¹⁹⁵We've had the bicycle identified, and we have a description of our man; so that's a long step on our journey.”

¹⁹⁶“It sounds to me like the beginning of the end,” said Holmes. ¹⁹⁷“I’m sure I congratulate you both with all my heart.”

¹⁹⁸“Well, I started from the fact that Mr. Douglas had seemed disturbed since the day before, when he had been at Tunbridge Wells. ¹⁹⁹It was at Tunbridge Wells then that he had become conscious of some danger. ²⁰⁰It was clear, therefore, that if a man had come over with a bicycle it was from Tunbridge Wells that he might be expected to have come. ²⁰¹We took the bicycle over with us and showed it at the hotels. ²⁰²It was identified at once by the manager of the Eagle Commercial as belonging to a man named Hargrave, who had taken a room there two days before. ²⁰³This bicycle and a small valise were his whole belongings. ²⁰⁴He had registered his name as coming from London, but had given no address. ²⁰⁵The valise was London made, and the contents were British; but the man himself was undoubtedly an American.”

²⁰⁶“Well, well,” said Holmes gleefully, “you have indeed done some solid work while I have been sitting spinning theories with my friend! ²⁰⁷It’s a lesson in being practical, Mr. Mac.”

²⁰⁸“Ay, it’s just that, Mr. Holmes,” said the inspector with satisfaction.

²⁰⁹“But this may all fit in with your theories,” I remarked.

²¹⁰“That may or may not be. ²¹¹But let us hear the end, Mr. Mac. ²¹²Was there nothing to identify this man?”

²¹³“So little that it was evident that he had carefully guarded himself against identification. ²¹⁴There were no papers or letters, and no marking upon the clothes. ²¹⁵A cycle map of the county lay on his bedroom table. ²¹⁶He had left the hotel after breakfast yesterday morning on his bicycle, and no more was heard of him until our inquiries.”

²¹⁷“That’s what puzzles me, Mr. Holmes,” said White Mason. ²¹⁸“If the fellow did not want the hue and cry raised over him, one would imagine that he would have returned and remained at the hotel as an inoffensive tourist. ²¹⁹As it is, he must know that he will be reported to the police by the hotel manager and that his disappearance will be connected with the murder.”

²²⁰“So one would imagine. ²²¹Still, he has been justified of his wisdom up to date, at any rate, since he has not been taken. ²²²But his description—what of that?”

²²³MacDonald referred to his notebook. ²²⁴“Here we have it so far as they could give it. ²²⁵They don’t seem to have taken any very particular stock of him; but still the porter, the clerk, and the chambermaid are all agreed that this about covers the points. ²²⁶He was a man about five foot nine in height, fifty or so years of age, his hair slightly grizzled, a grayish moustache, a curved nose, and a face which all of them described as fierce and forbidding.”

²²⁷“Well, bar the expression, that might almost be a description of Douglas himself,” said Holmes. ²²⁸“He is just over fifty, with grizzled hair and moustache, and about the same height. ²²⁹Did you get anything else?”

²³⁰“He was dressed in a heavy gray suit with a reefer jacket, and he wore a short yellow overcoat and a soft cap.”

²³¹“What about the shotgun?”

²³²“It is less than two feet long. ²³³It could very well have fitted into his valise. ²³⁴He could have carried it inside his overcoat without difficulty.”

²³⁵“And how do you consider that all this bears upon the general case?”

²³⁶“Well, Mr. Holmes,” said MacDonald, “when we have got our man—and you may be sure that I had his description on the wires within five minutes of hearing it—we shall be better able to judge. ²³⁷But, even as it stands, we have surely gone a long way. ²³⁸We know that an American calling himself Hargrave came to Tunbridge Wells two days ago with bicycle and valise. ²³⁹In the latter was a sawed-off shotgun; so he came with the deliberate purpose of crime. ²⁴⁰Yesterday morning he set off for this place on his bicycle, with his gun concealed in his overcoat. ²⁴¹No one saw him arrive, so far as we can learn; but he need not pass through the village to reach the park gates, and there are many cyclists upon the road. ²⁴²Presumably he at once concealed his cycle among the laurels where it was found, and possibly lurked there himself, with his eye on the house, waiting for Mr. Douglas to come out. ²⁴³The shotgun is a strange weapon to use inside a house; but he had intended to use it outside, and there it has very obvious advantages, as it would be impossible to miss with it, and the sound of shots is so common in an English sporting neighbourhood that no particular notice would be taken.”

²⁴⁴“That is all very clear,” said Holmes.

²⁴⁵“Well, Mr. Douglas did not appear. ²⁴⁶What was he to do next? ²⁴⁷He left his bicycle and approached the house in the twilight. ²⁴⁸He found the bridge down and no one about. ²⁴⁹He took his chance, intending, no doubt, to make some excuse if he met anyone. ²⁵⁰He met no one. ²⁵¹He slipped into the first room that he saw, and concealed himself behind the curtain. ²⁵²Thence he could see the drawbridge go up, and he knew that his only escape was through the moat. ²⁵³He waited until quarter-past eleven, when Mr. Douglas upon his usual nightly round came into the room. ²⁵⁴He shot him and escaped, as arranged. ²⁵⁵He was aware that the bicycle would be described by the hotel people and be a clue against him; so he left it there and made his way by some other means to London or to some safe hiding place which he had already arranged. ²⁵⁶How is that, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁵⁷“Well, Mr. Mac, it is very good and very clear so far as it goes. ²⁵⁸That is your end of the story. ²⁵⁹My end is that the crime was committed half an hour earlier than reported; that Mrs. Douglas and Barker are both in a conspiracy to conceal something; that they aided the murderer's escape—or at least that they reached the room before he escaped—and that they fabricated evidence of his escape through the window, whereas in all probability they had themselves let him go by lowering the bridge. ²⁶⁰That's my reading of the first half.”

²⁶¹The two detectives shook their heads.

²⁶²“Well, Mr. Holmes, if this is true, we only tumble out of one mystery into another,” said the London inspector.

²⁶³“And in some ways a worse one,” added White Mason. ²⁶⁴“The lady has never been in America in all her life. ²⁶⁵What possible connection could she have with an American assassin which would cause her to shelter him?”

²⁶⁶“I freely admit the difficulties,” said Holmes. ²⁶⁷“I propose to make a little investigation of my own to-night, and it is just possible that it may contribute something to the common cause.”

²⁶⁸“Can we help you, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁶⁹“No, no! ²⁷⁰Darkness and Dr. Watson's umbrella—my wants are simple. ²⁷¹And Ames, the faithful Ames, no doubt he will stretch a point for me. ²⁷²All my lines of thought lead me back invariably to the one basic question—why should an athletic man develop his frame upon so unnatural an instrument as a single dumb-bell?”

²⁷³It was late that night when Holmes returned from his solitary excursion. ²⁷⁴We slept in a double-bedded room, which was the best that the little country inn could do for us. ²⁷⁵I was already asleep when I was partly awakened by his entrance.

²⁷⁶“Well, Holmes,” I murmured, “have you found anything out?”

²⁷⁷He stood beside me in silence, his candle in his hand. ²⁷⁸Then the tall, lean figure inclined towards me. ²⁷⁹“I say, Watson,” he whispered, “would you be afraid to sleep in the same room with a lunatic, a man with softening of the brain, an idiot whose mind has lost its grip?”

²⁸⁰“Not in the least,” I answered in astonishment.

²⁸¹“Ah, that's lucky,” he said, and not another word would he utter that night.

Chapter VII.

The Solution

¹Next morning, after breakfast, we found Inspector MacDonald and White Mason seated in close consultation in the small parlour of the local police sergeant. ²On the table in front of them were piled a number of letters and telegrams, which they were carefully sorting and docketing. ³Three had been placed on one side.

⁴“Still on the track of the elusive bicyclist?” Holmes asked cheerfully. ⁵“What is the latest news of the ruffian?”

⁶MacDonald pointed ruefully to his heap of correspondence.

⁷“He is at present reported from Leicester, Nottingham, Southampton, Derby, East Ham, Richmond, and fourteen other places. ⁸In three of them—East Ham, Leicester, and Liverpool—there is a clear case against him, and he has actually been arrested. ⁹The country seems to be full of the fugitives with yellow coats.”

¹⁰“Dear me!” said Holmes sympathetically. ¹¹“Now, Mr. Mac and you, Mr. White Mason, I wish to give you a very earnest piece of advice. ¹²When I went into this case with you I bargained, as you will no doubt remember, that I should not present you with half-proved theories, but that I should retain and work out my own ideas until I had satisfied myself that they were correct. ¹³For this reason I am not at the present moment telling you all that is in my mind. ¹⁴On the other hand, I said that I would play the game fairly by you, and I do not think it is a fair game to allow you for one unnecessary moment to waste your energies upon a profitless task. ¹⁵Therefore I am here to advise you this morning, and my advice to you is summed up in three words—abandon the case.”

¹⁶MacDonald and White Mason stared in amazement at their celebrated colleague.

¹⁷“You consider it hopeless!” cried the inspector.

¹⁸“I consider your case to be hopeless. ¹⁹I do not consider that it is hopeless to arrive at the truth.”

²⁰“But this cyclist. ²¹He is not an invention. ²²We have his description, his valise, his bicycle. ²³The fellow must be somewhere. ²⁴Why should we not get him?”

²⁵“Yes, yes, no doubt he is somewhere, and no doubt we shall get him; but I would not have you waste your energies in East Ham or Liverpool. ²⁶I am sure that we can find some shorter cut to a result.”

²⁷“You are holding something back. ²⁸It's hardly fair of you, Mr. Holmes.” ²⁹The inspector was annoyed.

³⁰“You know my methods of work, Mr. Mac. ³¹But I will hold it back for the shortest time possible. ³²I only wish to verify my details in one way, which can very readily be done, and then I make my bow and return to London, leaving my results entirely at your service. ³³I owe you too much to act otherwise; for in all my experience I cannot recall any more singular and interesting study.”

³⁴“This is clean beyond me, Mr. Holmes. ³⁵We saw you when we returned from Tunbridge Wells last night, and you were in general agreement with our results. ³⁶What has happened since then to give you a completely new idea of the case?”

³⁷“Well, since you ask me, I spent, as I told you that I would, some hours last night at the Manor House.”

³⁸“Well, what happened?”

³⁹“Ah, I can only give you a very general answer to that for the moment. ⁴⁰By the way, I have been reading a short but clear and interesting account of the old building, purchasable at the modest sum of one penny from the local tobacconist.”

⁴¹Here Holmes drew a small tract, embellished with a rude engraving of the ancient Manor House, from his waistcoat pocket.

⁴²“It immensely adds to the zest of an investigation, my dear Mr. Mac, when one is in conscious sympathy with the historical atmosphere of one's surroundings. ⁴³Don't look so impatient; for I assure you that even so bald an account as this raises some sort of picture of the past in one's mind. ⁴⁴Permit me to give you a sample. ⁴⁵‘Erected in the fifth year of the reign of James I, and standing upon the site of a much older building, the Manor House of Birlstone presents one of the finest surviving examples of the moated Jacobean residence—’ ”

⁴⁶“You are making fools of us, Mr. Holmes!”

⁴⁷“Tut, tut, Mr. Mac!—the first sign of temper I have detected in you. ⁴⁸Well, I won't read it verbatim, since you feel so strongly upon the subject. ⁴⁹But when I tell you that there is some account of the taking of the place by a parliamentary colonel in 1644, of the concealment of Charles for several days in the course of the Civil War, and finally of a visit there by the second George, you will admit that there are various associations of interest connected with this ancient house.”

⁵⁰“I don't doubt it, Mr. Holmes; but that is no business of ours.”

⁵¹“Is it not? ⁵²Is it not? ⁵³Breadth of view, my dear Mr. Mac, is one of the essentials of our profession. ⁵⁴The interplay of ideas and the oblique uses of knowledge are often of extraordinary interest. ⁵⁵You will excuse these remarks from one who, though a mere connoisseur of crime, is still rather older and perhaps more experienced than yourself.”

⁵⁶“I'm the first to admit that,” said the detective heartily. ⁵⁷“You get to your point, I admit; but you have such a deuced round-the-corner way of doing it.”

⁵⁸“Well, well, I'll drop past history and get down to present-day facts. ⁵⁹I called last night, as I have already said, at the Manor House. ⁶⁰I did not see either Barker or Mrs. Douglas. ⁶¹I saw no necessity to disturb them; but I was pleased to hear that the lady was not visibly pining and that she had partaken of an excellent dinner. ⁶²My visit was specially made to the good Mr. Ames, with whom I exchanged some amiabilities, which culminated in his allowing me, without reference to anyone else, to sit alone for a time in the study.”

⁶³“What! ⁶⁴With that?” I ejaculated.

⁶⁵“No, no, everything is now in order. ⁶⁶You gave permission for that, Mr. Mac, as I am informed. ⁶⁷The room was in its normal state, and in it I passed an instructive quarter of an hour.”

⁶⁸“What were you doing?”

⁶⁹“Well, not to make a mystery of so simple a matter, I was looking for the missing dumb-bell. ⁷⁰It has always bulked rather large in my estimate of the case. ⁷¹I ended by finding it.”

⁷²“Where?”

⁷³“Ah, there we come to the edge of the unexplored. ⁷⁴Let me go a little further, a very little further, and I will promise that you shall share everything that I know.”

⁷⁵“Well, we're bound to take you on your own terms,” said the inspector; “but when it comes to telling us to abandon the case—why in the name of goodness should we abandon the case?”

⁷⁶“For the simple reason, my dear Mr. Mac, that you have not got the first idea what it is that you are investigating.”

⁷⁷“We are investigating the murder of Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor.”

⁷⁸“Yes, yes, so you are. ⁷⁹But don't trouble to trace the mysterious gentleman upon the bicycle. ⁸⁰I assure you that it won't help you.”

⁸¹“Then what do you suggest that we do?”

⁸²“I will tell you exactly what to do, if you will do it.”

⁸³“Well, I'm bound to say I've always found you had reason behind all your queer ways. ⁸⁴I'll do what you advise.”

⁸⁵“And you, Mr. White Mason?”

⁸⁶The country detective looked helplessly from one to the other. ⁸⁷Holmes and his methods were new to him. ⁸⁸“Well, if it is good enough for the inspector, it is good enough for me,” he said at last.

⁸⁹“Capital!” said Holmes. ⁹⁰“Well, then, I should recommend a nice, cheery country walk for both of you. ⁹¹They tell me that the views from Birlstone Ridge over the Weald are very remarkable. ⁹²No doubt lunch could be got at some suitable hostelry; though my ignorance of the country prevents me from recommending one. ⁹³In the evening, tired but happy—”

⁹⁴“Man, this is getting past a joke!” cried MacDonald, rising angrily from his chair.

⁹⁵“Well, well, spend the day as you like,” said Holmes, patting him cheerfully upon the shoulder. ⁹⁶“Do what you like and go where you will, but meet me here before dusk without fail—without fail, Mr. Mac.”

⁹⁷“That sounds more like sanity.”

⁹⁸“All of it was excellent advice; but I don't insist, so long as you are here when I need you. ⁹⁹But now, before we part, I want you to write a note to Mr. Barker.”

¹⁰⁰“Well?”

¹⁰¹“I'll dictate it, if you like. ¹⁰²Ready?”

¹⁰³“Dear Sir:

¹⁰⁴“It has struck me that it is our duty to drain the moat, in the hope that we may find some—”

¹⁰⁵“It's impossible,” said the inspector. ¹⁰⁶“I've made inquiry.”

¹⁰⁷“Tut, tut! ¹⁰⁸My dear sir, please do what I ask you.”

¹⁰⁹“Well, go on.”

¹¹⁰“—in the hope that we may find something which may bear upon our investigation. ¹¹¹I have made arrangements, and the workmen will be at work early to-morrow morning diverting the stream—”

¹¹²“Impossible!”

¹¹³“—diverting the stream; so I thought it best to explain matters beforehand.

¹¹⁴“Now sign that, and send it by hand about four o'clock. ¹¹⁵At that hour we shall meet again in this room. ¹¹⁶Until then we may each do what we like; for I can assure you that this inquiry has come to a definite pause.”

¹¹⁷Evening was drawing in when we reassembled. ¹¹⁸Holmes was very serious in his manner, myself curious, and the detectives obviously critical and annoyed.

¹¹⁹“Well, gentlemen,” said my friend gravely, “I am asking you now to put everything to the test with me, and you will judge for yourselves whether the observations I have made justify the conclusions to which I have come. ¹²⁰It is a chill evening, and I do not know how long our expedition may last; so I beg that you will wear your warmest coats. ¹²¹It is of the first importance that we should be in our places before it grows dark; so with your permission we shall get started at once.”

¹²²We passed along the outer bounds of the Manor House park until we came to a place where there was a gap in the rails which fenced it. ¹²³Through this we slipped, and then in the gathering gloom we followed Holmes until we had reached a shrubbery which lies nearly opposite to the main door and the drawbridge. ¹²⁴The latter had not been raised. ¹²⁵Holmes crouched down behind the screen of laurels, and we all three followed his example.

¹²⁶“Well, what are we to do now?” asked MacDonald with some gruffness.

¹²⁷“Possess our souls in patience and make as little noise as possible,” Holmes answered.

¹²⁸“What are we here for at all? ¹²⁹I really think that you might treat us with more frankness.”

¹³⁰Holmes laughed. ¹³¹“Watson insists that I am the dramatist in real life,” said he. ¹³²“Some touch of the artist wells up within me, and calls insistently for a well-staged performance. ¹³³Surely our profession, Mr. Mac, would be a drab and sordid one if we did not sometimes set the scene so as to glorify our results. ¹³⁴The blunt accusation, the brutal tap upon the shoulder—what can one make of such a dénouement? ¹³⁵But the quick inference, the subtle trap, the clever forecast of coming events, the triumphant vindication of bold theories—are these not the pride and the justification of our life's work? ¹³⁶At the present moment you thrill with the glamour of the situation and the anticipation of the hunt. ¹³⁷Where would be that thrill if I had been as definite as a timetable? ¹³⁸I only ask a little patience, Mr. Mac, and all will be clear to you.”

¹³⁹“Well, I hope the pride and justification and the rest of it will come before we all get our death of cold,” said the London detective with comic resignation.

¹⁴⁰We all had good reason to join in the aspiration; for our vigil was a long and bitter one. ¹⁴¹Slowly the shadows darkened over the long, sombre face of the old house. ¹⁴²A cold, damp reek from the moat chilled us to the bones and set our teeth chattering. ¹⁴³There was a single lamp over the gateway and a steady globe of light in the fatal study. ¹⁴⁴Everything else was dark and still.

¹⁴⁵“How long is this to last?” asked the inspector finally. ¹⁴⁶“And what is it we are watching for?”

¹⁴⁷“I have no more notion than you how long it is to last,” Holmes answered with some asperity. ¹⁴⁸“If criminals would always schedule their movements like railway trains, it would certainly be more convenient for all of us. ¹⁴⁹As to what it is we— ¹⁵⁰Well, that's what we are watching for!”

¹⁵¹As he spoke the bright, yellow light in the study was obscured by somebody passing to and fro before it. ¹⁵²The laurels among which we lay were immediately opposite the window and not more than a hundred feet from it. ¹⁵³Presently it was thrown open with a whining of hinges, and we could dimly see the dark outline of a man's head and shoulders looking out into the gloom. ¹⁵⁴For some minutes he peered forth in furtive, stealthy fashion, as one who wishes to be assured that he is unobserved. ¹⁵⁵Then he leaned forward, and in the intense silence we were aware of the soft lapping of agitated water. ¹⁵⁶He seemed to be stirring up the moat with something which he held in his hand. ¹⁵⁷Then suddenly he hauled something in as a fisherman lands a fish—some large, round object which obscured the light as it was dragged through the open casement.

¹⁵⁸“Now!” cried Holmes. ¹⁵⁹“Now!”

¹⁶⁰We were all upon our feet, staggering after him with our stiffened limbs, while he ran swiftly across the bridge and rang violently at the bell. ¹⁶¹There was the rasping of bolts from the other side, and the amazed Ames stood in the entrance. ¹⁶²Holmes brushed him aside without a word and, followed by all of us, rushed into the room which had been occupied by the man whom we had been watching.

¹⁶³The oil lamp on the table represented the glow which we had seen from outside. ¹⁶⁴It was now in the hand of Cecil Barker, who held it towards us as we entered. ¹⁶⁵Its light shone upon his strong, resolute, clean-shaved face and his menacing eyes.

¹⁶⁶“What the devil is the meaning of all this?” he cried. ¹⁶⁷“What are you after, anyhow?”

¹⁶⁸Holmes took a swift glance round, and then pounced upon a sodden bundle tied together with cord which lay where it had been thrust under the writing table.

¹⁶⁹“This is what we are after, Mr. Barker—this bundle, weighted with a dumb-bell, which you have just raised from the bottom of the moat.”

¹⁷⁰Barker stared at Holmes with amazement in his face. ¹⁷¹“How in thunder came you to know anything about it?” he asked.

¹⁷²“Simply that I put it there.”

¹⁷³“You put it there! ¹⁷⁴You!”

¹⁷⁵“Perhaps I should have said ‘replaced it there,’” said Holmes. ¹⁷⁶“You will remember, Inspector MacDonald, that I was somewhat struck by the absence of a dumb-bell. ¹⁷⁷I drew your attention to it; but with the pressure of other events you had hardly the time to give it the consideration which would have enabled you to draw deductions from it. ¹⁷⁸When water is near and a weight is missing it is not a very far-fetched supposition that something has been sunk in the water. ¹⁷⁹The idea was at least worth testing; so with the help of Ames, who admitted me to the room, and the crook of Dr. Watson's umbrella, I was able last night to fish up and inspect this bundle.

¹⁸⁰“It was of the first importance, however, that we should be able to prove who placed it there. ¹⁸¹This we accomplished by the very obvious device of announcing that the moat would be dried to-morrow, which had, of course, the effect that whoever had hidden the bundle would most certainly withdraw it the moment that darkness enabled him to do so. ¹⁸²We have no less than four witnesses as to who it was who took advantage of the opportunity, and so, Mr. Barker, I think the word lies now with you.”

¹⁸³Sherlock Holmes put the sopping bundle upon the table beside the lamp and undid the cord which bound it. ¹⁸⁴From within he extracted a dumb-bell, which he tossed down to its fellow in the corner. ¹⁸⁵Next he drew forth a pair of boots. ¹⁸⁶“American, as you perceive,” he remarked, pointing to the toes. ¹⁸⁷Then he laid upon the table a long, deadly, sheathed knife. ¹⁸⁸Finally he unravelled a bundle of clothing, comprising a complete set of underclothes, socks, a gray tweed suit, and a short yellow overcoat.

¹⁸⁹“The clothes are commonplace,” remarked Holmes, “save only the overcoat, which is full of suggestive touches.” ¹⁹⁰He held it tenderly towards the light. ¹⁹¹“Here, as you perceive, is the inner pocket prolonged into the lining in such fashion as to give ample space for the truncated fowling piece. ¹⁹²The tailor's tab is on the neck—‘Neal, Outfitter, Vermissa, U. S. A.’ ¹⁹³I have spent an instructive afternoon in the rector's library, and have enlarged my knowledge by adding the fact that Vermissa is a flourishing little town at the head of one of the best known coal and iron valleys in the United States. ¹⁹⁴I have some recollection, Mr. Barker, that you associated the coal districts with Mr. Douglas's first wife, and it would surely not be too far-fetched an inference that the V. V. upon the card by the dead body might stand for Vermissa Valley, or that this very valley which sends forth emissaries of murder

may be that Valley of Fear of which we have heard. ¹⁹⁵So much is fairly clear. ¹⁹⁶And now, Mr. Barker, I seem to be standing rather in the way of your explanation.”

¹⁹⁷It was a sight to see Cecil Barker's expressive face during this exposition of the great detective.

¹⁹⁸Anger, amazement, consternation, and indecision swept over it in turn. ¹⁹⁹Finally he took refuge in a somewhat acrid irony.

²⁰⁰“You know such a lot, Mr. Holmes, perhaps you had better tell us some more,” he sneered.

²⁰¹“I have no doubt that I could tell you a great deal more, Mr. Barker; but it would come with a better grace from you.”

²⁰²“Oh, you think so, do you? ²⁰²Well, all I can say is that if there's any secret here it is not my secret, and I am not the man to give it away.”

²⁰³“Well, if you take that line, Mr. Barker,” said the inspector quietly, “we must just keep you in sight until we have the warrant and can hold you.”

²⁰⁴“You can do what you damn please about that,” said Barker defiantly.

²⁰⁵The proceedings seemed to have come to a definite end so far as he was concerned; for one had only to look at that granite face to realize that no *peine forte et dure* would ever force him to plead against his will. ²⁰⁶The deadlock was broken, however, by a woman's voice. ²⁰⁷Mrs. Douglas had been standing listening at the half opened door, and now she entered the room.

²⁰⁸“You have done enough for now, Cecil,” said she. ²⁰⁹“Whatever comes of it in the future, you have done enough.”

²¹⁰“Enough and more than enough,” remarked Sherlock Holmes gravely. ²¹¹“I have every sympathy with you, madam, and should strongly urge you to have some confidence in the common sense of our jurisdiction and to take the police voluntarily into your complete confidence. ²¹²It may be that I am myself at fault for not following up the hint which you conveyed to me through my friend, Dr. Watson; but, at that time I had every reason to believe that you were directly concerned in the crime. ²¹³Now I am assured that this is not so. ²¹⁴At the same time, there is much that is unexplained, and I should strongly recommend that you ask Mr. Douglas to tell us his own story.”

²¹⁵Mrs. Douglas gave a cry of astonishment at Holmes's words. ²¹⁶The detectives and I must have echoed it, when we were aware of a man who seemed to have emerged from the wall, who advanced now from the gloom of the corner in which he had appeared. ²¹⁷Mrs. Douglas turned, and in an instant her arms were round him. ²¹⁸Barker had seized his outstretched hand.

²¹⁹“It's best this way, Jack,” his wife repeated; “I am sure that it is best.”

²²⁰“Indeed, yes, Mr. Douglas,” said Sherlock Holmes, “I am sure that you will find it best.”

²²¹The man stood blinking at us with the dazed look of one who comes from the dark into the light. ²²²It was a remarkable face, bold gray eyes, a strong, short-clipped, grizzled moustache, a square, projecting chin, and a humorous mouth. ²²³He took a good look at us all, and then to my amazement he advanced to me and handed me a bundle of paper.

²²⁴“I've heard of you,” said he in a voice which was not quite English and not quite American, but was altogether mellow and pleasing. ²²⁵“You are the historian of this bunch. ²²⁶Well, Dr. Watson, you've never had such a story as that pass through your hands before, and I'll lay my last dollar on that. ²²⁷Tell it your own way; but there are the facts, and you can't miss the public so long as you have those. ²²⁸I've been cooped up two days, and I've spent the daylight hours—as much daylight as I could get in that rat

trap—in putting the thing into words. ²²⁹You're welcome to them—you and your public. ²³⁰There's the story of the Valley of Fear.”

²³¹“That's the past, Mr. Douglas,” said Sherlock Holmes quietly. ²³²“What we desire now is to hear your story of the present.”

²³³“You'll have it, sir,” said Douglas. ²³⁴“May I smoke as I talk? ²³⁵Well, thank you, Mr. Holmes. ²³⁶You're a smoker yourself, if I remember right, and you'll guess what it is to be sitting for two days with tobacco in your pocket and afraid that the smell will give you away.” ²³⁶He leaned against the mantelpiece and sucked at the cigar which Holmes had handed him. ²³⁷“I've heard of you, Mr. Holmes. ²³⁸I never guessed that I should meet you. ²³⁹But before you are through with that,” he nodded at my papers, “you will say I've brought you something fresh.”

²⁴⁰Inspector MacDonald had been staring at the newcomer with the greatest amazement. ²⁴¹“Well, this fairly beats me!” he cried at last. ²⁴²“If you are Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor, then whose death have we been investigating for these two days, and where in the world have you sprung from now? ²⁴³You seemed to me to come out of the floor like a jack-in-a-box.”

²⁴⁴“Ah, Mr. Mac,” said Holmes, shaking a reproving forefinger, “you would not read that excellent local compilation which described the concealment of King Charles. ²⁴⁵People did not hide in those days without excellent hiding places, and the hiding place that has once been used may be again. ²⁴⁶I had persuaded myself that we should find Mr. Douglas under this roof.”

²⁴⁷“And how long have you been playing this trick upon us, Mr. Holmes?” said the inspector angrily. ²⁴⁸“How long have you allowed us to waste ourselves upon a search that you knew to be an absurd one?”

²⁴⁹“Not one instant, my dear Mr. Mac. ²⁵⁰Only last night did I form my views of the case. ²⁵¹As they could not be put to the proof until this evening, I invited you and your colleague to take a holiday for the day. ²⁵²Pray what more could I do? ²⁵³When I found the suit of clothes in the moat, it at once became apparent to me that the body we had found could not have been the body of Mr. John Douglas at all, but must be that of the bicyclist from Tunbridge Wells. ²⁵⁴No other conclusion was possible. ²⁵⁵Therefore I had to determine where Mr. John Douglas himself could be, and the balance of probability was that with the connivance of his wife and his friend he was concealed in a house which had such conveniences for a fugitive, and awaiting quieter times when he could make his final escape.”

²⁵⁶“Well, you figured it out about right,” said Douglas approvingly. ²⁵⁷“I thought I'd dodge your British law; for I was not sure how I stood under it, and also I saw my chance to throw these hounds once for all off my track. ²⁵⁸Mind you, from first to last I have done nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing that I would not do again; but you'll judge that for yourselves when I tell you my story. ²⁵⁹Never mind warning me, Inspector: I'm ready to stand pat upon the truth.

²⁶⁰“I'm not going to begin at the beginning. ²⁶¹That's all there,” he indicated my bundle of papers, “and a mighty queer yarn you'll find it. ²⁶²It all comes down to this: ²⁶³That there are some men that have good cause to hate me and would give their last dollar to know that they had got me. ²⁶⁴So long as I am alive and they are alive, there is no safety in this world for me. ²⁶⁵They hunted me from Chicago to California, then they chased me out of America; but when I married and settled down in this quiet spot I thought my last years were going to be peaceable.

²⁶⁶“I never explained to my wife how things were. ²⁶⁷Why should I pull her into it? ²⁶⁸She would never have a quiet moment again; but would always be imagining trouble. ²⁶⁹I fancy she knew something, for I may have dropped a word here or a word there; but until yesterday, after you gentlemen had seen her, she never knew the rights of the matter. ²⁷⁰She told you all she knew, and so did Barker here; for on the night when this thing happened there was mighty little time for explanations. ²⁷¹She knows everything

now, and I would have been a wiser man if I had told her sooner. ²⁷²But it was a hard question, dear,” he took her hand for an instant in his own, “and I acted for the best.

²⁷³“Well, gentlemen, the day before these happenings I was over in Tunbridge Wells, and I got a glimpse of a man in the street. ²⁷⁴It was only a glimpse; but I have a quick eye for these things, and I never doubted who it was. ²⁷⁵It was the worst enemy I had among them all—one who has been after me like a hungry wolf after a caribou all these years. ²⁷⁶I knew there was trouble coming, and I came home and made ready for it. ²⁷⁷I guessed I'd fight through it all right on my own, my luck was a proverb in the States about '76. ²⁷⁸I never doubted that it would be with me still.

²⁷⁹“I was on my guard all that next day, and never went out into the park. ²⁸⁰It's as well, or he'd have had the drop on me with that buckshot gun of his before ever I could draw on him. ²⁸¹After the bridge was up—my mind was always more restful when that bridge was up in the evenings—I put the thing clear out of my head. ²⁸²I never dreamed of his getting into the house and waiting for me. ²⁸³But when I made my round in my dressing gown, as was my habit, I had no sooner entered the study than I scented danger. ²⁸⁴I guess when a man has had dangers in his life—and I've had more than most in my time—there is a kind of sixth sense that waves the red flag. ²⁸⁵I saw the signal clear enough, and yet I couldn't tell you why. ²⁸⁶Next instant I spotted a boot under the window curtain, and then I saw why plain enough.

²⁸⁷“I'd just the one candle that was in my hand; but there was a good light from the hall lamp through the open door. ²⁸⁸I put down the candle and jumped for a hammer that I'd left on the mantel. ²⁸⁹At the same moment he sprang at me. ²⁹⁰I saw the glint of a knife, and I lashed at him with the hammer. ²⁹¹I got him somewhere; for the knife tinkled down on the floor. ²⁹²He dodged round the table as quick as an eel, and a moment later he'd got his gun from under his coat. ²⁹³I heard him cock it; but I had got hold of it before he could fire. ²⁹⁴I had it by the barrel, and we wrestled for it all ends up for a minute or more. ²⁹⁵It was death to the man that lost his grip.

²⁹⁶“He never lost his grip; but he got it butt downward for a moment too long. ²⁹⁷Maybe it was I that pulled the trigger. ²⁹⁸Maybe we just jolted it off between us. ²⁹⁹Anyhow, he got both barrels in the face, and there I was, staring down at all that was left of Ted Baldwin. ³⁰⁰I'd recognized him in the township, and again when he sprang for me; but his own mother wouldn't recognize him as I saw him then. ³⁰¹I'm used to rough work; but I fairly turned sick at the sight of him.

³⁰²“I was hanging on the side of the table when Barker came hurrying down. ³⁰³I heard my wife coming, and I ran to the door and stopped her. ³⁰⁴It was no sight for a woman. ³⁰⁵I promised I'd come to her soon. ³⁰⁶I said a word or two to Barker—he took it all in at a glance—and we waited for the rest to come along. ³⁰⁷But there was no sign of them. ³⁰⁸Then we understood that they could hear nothing, and that all that had happened was known only to ourselves.

³⁰⁹“It was at that instant that the idea came to me. ³¹⁰I was fairly dazzled by the brilliance of it. ³¹¹The man's sleeve had slipped up and there was the branded mark of the lodge upon his forearm. ³¹²See here!”

³¹³The man whom we had known as Douglas turned up his own coat and cuff to show a brown triangle within a circle exactly like that which we had seen upon the dead man.

³¹⁴“It was the sight of that which started me on it. ³¹⁵I seemed to see it all clear at a glance. ³¹⁶There were his height and hair and figure, about the same as my own. ³¹⁷No one could swear to his face, poor devil! ³¹⁸I brought down this suit of clothes, and in a quarter of an hour Barker and I had put my dressing gown on him and he lay as you found him. ³¹⁹We tied all his things into a bundle, and I weighted them with the only weight I could find and put them through the window. ³²⁰The card he had meant to lay upon my body was lying beside his own.

³²¹“My rings were put on his finger; but when it came to the wedding ring,” he held out his muscular hand, “you can see for yourselves that I had struck the limit. ³²²I have not moved it since the day I was married, and it would have taken a file to get it off. ³²³I don't know, anyhow, that I should have cared to part with it; but if I had wanted to I couldn't. ³²⁴So we just had to leave that detail to take care of itself. ³²⁵On the other hand, I brought a bit of plaster down and put it where I am wearing one myself at this instant. ³²⁶You slipped up there, Mr. Holmes, clever as you are; for if you had chanced to take off that plaster you would have found no cut underneath it.

³²⁷“Well, that was the situation. ³²⁸If I could lie low for a while and then get away where I could be joined by my ‘widow’ we should have a chance at last of living in peace for the rest of our lives. ³²⁹These devils would give me no rest so long as I was above ground; but if they saw in the papers that Baldwin had got his man, there would be an end of all my troubles. ³³⁰I hadn't much time to make it all clear to Barker and to my wife; but they understood enough to be able to help me. ³³¹I knew all about this hiding place, so did Ames; but it never entered his head to connect it with the matter. ³³²I retired into it, and it was up to Barker to do the rest.

³³³“I guess you can fill in for yourselves what he did. ³³⁴He opened the window and made the mark on the sill to give an idea of how the murderer escaped. ³³⁵It was a tall order, that; but as the bridge was up there was no other way. ³³⁶Then, when everything was fixed, he rang the bell for all he was worth. ³³⁷What happened afterward you know. ³³⁸And so, gentlemen, you can do what you please; but I've told you the truth and the whole truth, so help me God! ³³⁹What I ask you now is how do I stand by the English law?”

³⁴⁰There was a silence which was broken by Sherlock Holmes.

³⁴¹“The English law is in the main a just law. ³⁴²You will get no worse than your deserts from that, Mr. Douglas. ³⁴³But I would ask you how did this man know that you lived here, or how to get into your house, or where to hide to get you?”

³⁴⁴“I know nothing of this.”

³⁴⁵Holmes's face was very white and grave. ³⁴⁶“The story is not over yet, I fear,” said he. ³⁴⁷“You may find worse dangers than the English law, or even than your enemies from America. ³⁴⁸I see trouble before you, Mr. Douglas. ³⁴⁹You'll take my advice and still be on your guard.”

³⁵⁰And now, my long-suffering readers, I will ask you to come away with me for a time, far from the Sussex Manor House of Birlstone, and far also from the year of grace in which we made our eventful journey which ended with the strange story of the man who had been known as John Douglas. ³⁵¹I wish you to journey back some twenty years in time, and westward some thousands of miles in space, that I may lay before you a singular and terrible narrative—so singular and so terrible that you may find it hard to believe that even as I tell it, even so did it occur.

³⁵²Do not think that I intrude one story before another is finished. ³⁵³As you read on you will find that this is not so. ³⁵⁴And when I have detailed those distant events and you have solved this mystery of the past, we shall meet once more in those rooms on Baker Street, where this, like so many other wonderful happenings, will find its end.

PART II.
The Scowrers
Chapter VIII.
The Man

¹It was the fourth of February in the year 1875. ²It had been a severe winter, and the snow lay deep in the gorges of the Gilmerton Mountains. ³The steam ploughs had, however, kept the railroad open, and the evening train which connects the long line of coal-mining and iron-working settlements was slowly groaning its way up the steep gradients which lead from Stagville on the plain to Vermissa, the central township which lies at the head of Vermissa Valley. ⁴From this point the track sweeps downward to Bartons Crossing, Helmdale, and the purely agricultural county of Merton. ⁵It was a single-track railroad; but at every siding—and they were numerous—long lines of trucks piled with coal and iron ore told of the hidden wealth which had brought a rude population and a bustling life to this most desolate corner of the United States of America.

⁶For desolate it was! ⁷Little could the first pioneer who had traversed it have ever imagined that the fairest prairies and the most lush water pastures were valueless compared to this gloomy land of black crag and tangled forest. ⁸Above the dark and often scarcely penetrable woods upon their flanks, the high, bare crowns of the mountains, white snow, and jagged rock towered upon each flank, leaving a long, winding, tortuous valley in the centre. ⁹Up this the little train was slowly crawling.

¹⁰The oil lamps had just been lit in the leading passenger car, a long, bare carriage in which some twenty or thirty people were seated. ¹¹The greater number of these were workmen returning from their day's toil in the lower part of the valley. ¹²At least a dozen, by their grimed faces and the safety lanterns which they carried, proclaimed themselves miners. ¹³These sat smoking in a group and conversed in low voices, glancing occasionally at two men on the opposite side of the car, whose uniforms and badges showed them to be policemen.

¹⁴Several women of the labouring class and one or two travellers who might have been small local storekeepers made up the rest of the company, with the exception of one young man in a corner by himself. ¹⁵It is with this man that we are concerned. ¹⁶Take a good look at him, for he is worth it.

¹⁷He is a fresh-complexioned, middle-sized young man, not far, one would guess, from his thirtieth year. ¹⁸He has large, shrewd, humorous gray eyes which twinkle inquiringly from time to time as he looks round through his spectacles at the people about him. ¹⁹It is easy to see that he is of a sociable and possibly simple disposition, anxious to be friendly to all men. ²⁰Anyone could pick him at once as gregarious in his habits and communicative in his nature, with a quick wit and a ready smile. ²¹And yet the man who studied him more closely might discern a certain firmness of jaw and grim tightness about the lips which would warn him that there were depths beyond, and that this pleasant, brown-haired young Irishman might conceivably leave his mark for good or evil upon any society to which he was introduced.

²²Having made one or two tentative remarks to the nearest miner, and receiving only short, gruff replies, the traveller resigned himself to uncongenial silence, staring moodily out of the window at the fading landscape.

²³It was not a cheering prospect. ²⁴Through the growing gloom there pulsed the red glow of the furnaces on the sides of the hills. ²⁵Great heaps of slag and dumps of cinders loomed up on each side, with the high shafts of the collieries towering above them. ²⁶Huddled groups of mean, wooden houses, the

windows of which were beginning to outline themselves in light, were scattered here and there along the line, and the frequent halting places were crowded with their swarthy inhabitants.

²⁷The iron and coal valleys of the Vermissa district were no resorts for the leisured or the cultured.

²⁸Everywhere there were stern signs of the crudest battle of life, the rude work to be done, and the rude, strong workers who did it.

²⁹The young traveller gazed out into this dismal country with a face of mingled repulsion and interest, which showed that the scene was new to him. ³⁰At intervals he drew from his pocket a bulky letter to which he referred, and on the margins of which he scribbled some notes. ³¹Once from the back of his waist he produced something which one would hardly have expected to find in the possession of so mild-mannered a man. ³²It was a navy revolver of the largest size. ³³As he turned it slantwise to the light, the glint upon the rims of the copper shells within the drum showed that it was fully loaded. ³⁴He quickly restored it to his secret pocket, but not before it had been observed by a working man who had seated himself upon the adjoining bench.

³⁵"Hullo, mate!" said he. ³⁶"You seem heeled and ready."

³⁷The young man smiled with an air of embarrassment.

³⁸"Yes," said he, "we need them sometimes in the place I come from."

³⁹"And where may that be?"

⁴⁰"I'm last from Chicago."

⁴¹"A stranger in these parts?"

⁴²"Yes."

⁴³"You may find you need it here," said the workman.

⁴⁴"Ah! is that so?" ⁴⁵The young man seemed interested.

⁴⁶"Have you heard nothing of doings hereabouts?"

⁴⁷"Nothing out of the way."

⁴⁸"Why, I thought the country was full of it. ⁴⁹You'll hear quick enough. ⁵⁰What made you come here?"

⁵¹"I heard there was always work for a willing man."

⁵²"Are you a member of the union?"

⁵³"Sure."

⁵⁴"Then you'll get your job, I guess. ⁵⁵Have you any friends?"

⁵⁶"Not yet; but I have the means of making them."

⁵⁷"How's that, then?"

⁵⁸"I am one of the Eminent Order of Freeman. ⁵⁹There's no town without a lodge, and where there is a lodge I'll find my friends."

⁶⁰The remark had a singular effect upon his companion. ⁶¹He glanced round suspiciously at the others in the car. ⁶²The miners were still whispering among themselves. ⁶³The two police officers were dozing.

⁶⁴He came across, seated himself close to the young traveller, and held out his hand.

⁶⁵"Put it there," he said.

⁶⁶A hand-grip passed between the two.

⁶⁷“I see you speak the truth,” said the workman. ⁶⁸“But it's well to make certain.” ⁶⁹He raised his right hand to his right eyebrow. ⁷⁰The traveller at once raised his left hand to his left eyebrow.

⁷¹“Dark nights are unpleasant,” said the workman.

⁷²“Yes, for strangers to travel,” the other answered.

⁷³“That's good enough. ⁷⁴I'm Brother Scanlan, Lodge 341, Vermissa Valley. ⁷⁵Glad to see you in these parts.”

⁷⁶“Thank you. ⁷⁷I'm Brother John McMurdo, Lodge 29, Chicago. Bodymaster J. H. Scott. ⁷⁸But I am in luck to meet a brother so early.”

⁷⁹“Well, there are plenty of us about. ⁸⁰You won't find the order more flourishing anywhere in the States than right here in Vermissa Valley. ⁸¹But we could do with some lads like you. ⁸²I can't understand a spry man of the union finding no work to do in Chicago.”

⁸³“I found plenty of work to do,” said McMurdo.

⁸⁴“Then why did you leave?”

⁸⁵McMurdo nodded towards the policemen and smiled. ⁸⁶“I guess those chaps would be glad to know,” he said.

⁸⁷Scanlan groaned sympathetically. ⁸⁸“In trouble?” he asked in a whisper.

⁸⁹“Deep.”

⁹⁰“A penitentiary job?”

⁹¹“And the rest.”

⁹²“Not a killing!”

⁹³“It's early days to talk of such things,” said McMurdo with the air of a man who had been surprised into saying more than he intended. ⁹⁴“I've my own good reasons for leaving Chicago, and let that be enough for you. ⁹⁵Who are you that you should take it on yourself to ask such things?” ⁹⁶His gray eyes gleamed with sudden and dangerous anger from behind his glasses.

⁹⁷“All right, mate, no offense meant. ⁹⁸The boys will think none the worse of you, whatever you may have done. ⁹⁹Where are you bound for now?”

¹⁰⁰“Vermissa.”

¹⁰¹“That's the third halt down the line. ¹⁰²Where are you staying?”

¹⁰³McMurdo took out an envelope and held it close to the murky oil lamp. ¹⁰⁴“Here is the address—Jacob Shafter, Sheridan Street. ¹⁰⁵It's a boarding house that was recommended by a man I knew in Chicago.”

¹⁰⁶“Well, I don't know it; but Vermissa is out of my beat. ¹⁰⁷I live at Hobson's Patch, and that's here where we are drawing up. ¹⁰⁸But, say, there's one bit of advice I'll give you before we part: ¹⁰⁹If you're in trouble in Vermissa, go straight to the Union House and see Boss McGinty. ¹¹⁰He is the Bodymaster of Vermissa Lodge, and nothing can happen in these parts unless Black Jack McGinty wants it. ¹¹¹So long, mate! ¹¹²Maybe we'll meet in lodge one of these evenings. ¹¹³But mind my words: ¹¹⁴If you are in trouble, go to Boss McGinty.”

¹¹⁵Scanlan descended, and McMurdo was left once again to his thoughts. ¹¹⁶Night had now fallen, and the flames of the frequent furnaces were roaring and leaping in the darkness. ¹¹⁷Against their lurid background dark figures were bending and straining, twisting and turning, with the motion of winch or of windlass, to the rhythm of an eternal clank and roar.

¹¹⁸“I guess hell must look something like that,” said a voice.

¹¹⁹McMurdo turned and saw that one of the policemen had shifted in his seat and was staring out into the fiery waste.

¹²⁰“For that matter,” said the other policeman, “I allow that hell must be something like that. ¹²¹If there are worse devils down yonder than some we could name, it's more than I'd expect. ¹²²I guess you are new to this part, young man?”

¹²³“Well, what if I am?” McMurdo answered in a surly voice.

¹²⁴“Just this, mister, that I should advise you to be careful in choosing your friends. ¹²⁵I don't think I'd begin with Mike Scanlan or his gang if I were you.”

¹²⁶“What the hell is it to you who are my friends?” roared McMurdo in a voice which brought every head in the carriage round to witness the altercation. ¹²⁷“Did I ask you for your advice, or did you think me such a sucker that I couldn't move without it? ¹²⁸You speak when you are spoken to, and by the Lord you'd have to wait a long time if it was me!” ¹²⁹He thrust out his face and grinned at the patrolmen like a snarling dog.

¹³⁰The two policemen, heavy, good-natured men, were taken aback by the extraordinary vehemence with which their friendly advances had been rejected.

¹³¹“No offense, stranger,” said one. ¹³²“It was a warning for your own good, seeing that you are, by your own showing, new to the place.”

¹³³“I'm new to the place; but I'm not new to you and your kind!” cried McMurdo in cold fury. ¹³⁴“I guess you're the same in all places, shoving your advice in when nobody asks for it.”

¹³⁵“Maybe we'll see more of you before very long,” said one of the patrolmen with a grin. ¹³⁶“You're a real hand-picked one, if I am a judge.”

¹³⁷“I was thinking the same,” remarked the other. ¹³⁸“I guess we may meet again.”

¹³⁹“I'm not afraid of you, and don't you think it!” cried McMurdo. ¹⁴⁰“My name's Jack McMurdo—see?

¹⁴¹If you want me, you'll find me at Jacob Shafter's on Sheridan Street, Vermissa; so I'm not hiding from you, am I? ¹⁴²Day or night I dare to look the like of you in the face—don't make any mistake about that!”

¹⁴³There was a murmur of sympathy and admiration from the miners at the dauntless demeanour of the newcomer, while the two policemen shrugged their shoulders and renewed a conversation between themselves.

¹⁴⁴A few minutes later the train ran into the ill-lit station, and there was a general clearing; for Vermissa was by far the largest town on the line. ¹⁴⁵McMurdo picked up his leather gripsack and was about to start off into the darkness, when one of the miners accosted him.

¹⁴⁶“By Gar, mate! you know how to speak to the cops,” he said in a voice of awe. ¹⁴⁷“It was grand to hear you. ¹⁴⁸Let me carry your grip and show you the road. ¹⁴⁹I'm passing Shafter's on the way to my own shack.”

¹⁵⁰There was a chorus of friendly “Good-nights” from the other miners as they passed from the platform.
¹⁵¹Before ever he had set foot in it, McMurdo the turbulent had become a character in Vermissa.

¹⁵²The country had been a place of terror; but the town was in its way even more depressing. ¹⁵³Down that long valley there was at least a certain gloomy grandeur in the huge fires and the clouds of drifting smoke, while the strength and industry of man found fitting monuments in the hills which he had spilled by the side of his monstrous excavations. ¹⁵⁴But the town showed a dead level of mean ugliness and squalor. ¹⁵⁵The broad street was churned up by the traffic into a horrible rutted paste of muddy snow. ¹⁵⁶The sidewalks were narrow and uneven. ¹⁵⁷The numerous gas-lamps served only to show more clearly a long line of wooden houses, each with its veranda facing the street, unkempt and dirty.

¹⁵⁸As they approached the centre of the town the scene was brightened by a row of well-lit stores, and even more by a cluster of saloons and gaming houses, in which the miners spent their hard-earned but generous wages.

¹⁵⁹“That’s the Union House,” said the guide, pointing to one saloon which rose almost to the dignity of being a hotel. ¹⁶⁰“Jack McGinty is the boss there.”

¹⁶¹“What sort of a man is he?” McMurdo asked.

¹⁶²“What! have you never heard of the boss?”

¹⁶³“How could I have heard of him when you know that I am a stranger in these parts?”

¹⁶⁴“Well, I thought his name was known clear across the country. ¹⁶⁵It’s been in the papers often enough.”

¹⁶⁶“What for?”

¹⁶⁷“Well,” the miner lowered his voice—“over the affairs.”

¹⁶⁸“What affairs?”

¹⁶⁹“Good Lord, mister! you are queer, if I must say it without offense. ¹⁷⁰There’s only one set of affairs that you’ll hear of in these parts, and that’s the affairs of the Scowrsers.”

¹⁷¹“Why, I seem to have read of the Scowrsers in Chicago. ¹⁷²A gang of murderers, are they not?”

¹⁷³“Hush, on your life!” cried the miner, standing still in alarm, and gazing in amazement at his companion. ¹⁷⁴“Man, you won’t live long in these parts if you speak in the open street like that. ¹⁷⁵Many a man has had the life beaten out of him for less.”

¹⁷⁶“Well, I know nothing about them. ¹⁷⁷It’s only what I have read.”

¹⁷⁸“And I’m not saying that you have not read the truth.” ¹⁷⁹The man looked nervously round him as he spoke, peering into the shadows as if he feared to see some lurking danger. ¹⁸⁰“If killing is murder, then God knows there is murder and to spare. ¹⁸¹But don’t you dare to breathe the name of Jack McGinty in connection with it, stranger; for every whisper goes back to him, and he is not one that is likely to let it pass. ¹⁸²Now, that’s the house you’re after, that one standing back from the street. ¹⁸³You’ll find old Jacob Shafter that runs it as honest a man as lives in this township.”

¹⁸⁴“I thank you,” said McMurdo, and shaking hands with his new acquaintance he plodded, gripsack in hand, up the path which led to the dwelling house, at the door of which he gave a resounding knock.

¹⁸⁵It was opened at once by someone very different from what he had expected. ¹⁸⁶It was a woman, young and singularly beautiful. ¹⁸⁷She was of the German type, blonde and fair-haired, with the piquant contrast of a pair of beautiful dark eyes with which she surveyed the stranger with surprise and a pleasing embarrassment which brought a wave of colour over her pale face. ¹⁸⁸Framed in the bright light

of the open doorway, it seemed to McMurdo that he had never seen a more beautiful picture; the more attractive for its contrast with the sordid and gloomy surroundings. ¹⁸⁹A lovely violet growing upon one of those black slag-heaps of the mines would not have seemed more surprising. ¹⁹⁰So entranced was he that he stood staring without a word, and it was she who broke the silence.

¹⁹¹"I thought it was father," said she with a pleasing little touch of a German accent. ¹⁹²"Did you come to see him? ¹⁹³He is downtown. ¹⁹⁴I expect him back every minute."

¹⁹⁵McMurdo continued to gaze at her in open admiration until her eyes dropped in confusion before this masterful visitor.

¹⁹⁹"No, miss," he said at last, "I'm in no hurry to see him. ²⁰⁰But your house was recommended to me for board. ²⁰¹I thought it might suit me—and now I know it will."

²⁰²"You are quick to make up your mind," said she with a smile.

²⁰³"Anyone but a blind man could do as much," the other answered.

²⁰⁴She laughed at the compliment. ²⁰⁵"Come right in, sir," she said. ²⁰⁶"I'm Miss Ettie Shafter, Mr. Shafter's daughter. ²⁰⁷My mother's dead, and I run the house. ²⁰⁸You can sit down by the stove in the front room until father comes along— ²⁰⁹Ah, here he is! ²¹⁰So you can fix things with him right away."

²¹¹A heavy, elderly man came plodding up the path. ²¹²In a few words McMurdo explained his business. ²¹³A man of the name of Murphy had given him the address in Chicago. ²¹⁴He in turn had had it from someone else. ²¹⁵Old Shafter was quite ready. ²¹⁶The stranger made no bones about terms, agreed at once to every condition, and was apparently fairly flush of money. ²¹⁷For seven dollars a week paid in advance he was to have board and lodging.

²¹⁸So it was that McMurdo, the self-confessed fugitive from justice, took up his abode under the roof of the Shafter, the first step which was to lead to so long and dark a train of events, ending in a far distant land.

Chapter IX.

The Bodymaster

¹McMurdo was a man who made his mark quickly. ²Wherever he was the folk around soon knew it. ³Within a week he had become infinitely the most important person at Shafter's. ⁴There were ten or a dozen boarders there; but they were honest foremen or commonplace clerks from the stores, of a very different calibre from the young Irishman. ⁵Of an evening when they gathered together his joke was always the readiest, his conversation the brightest, and his song the best. ⁶He was a born boon companion, with a magnetism which drew good humour from all around him.

⁷And yet he showed again and again, as he had shown in the railway carriage, a capacity for sudden, fierce anger, which compelled the respect and even the fear of those who met him. ⁸For the law, too, and all who were connected with it, he exhibited a bitter contempt which delighted some and alarmed others of his fellow boarders.

⁹From the first he made it evident, by his open admiration, that the daughter of the house had won his heart from the instant that he had set eyes upon her beauty and her grace. ¹⁰He was no backward suitor. ¹¹On the second day he told her that he loved her, and from then onward he repeated the same story with an absolute disregard of what she might say to discourage him.

¹²"Someone else?" he would cry. ¹³"Well, the worse luck for someone else! ¹⁴Let him look out for himself! ¹⁵Am I to lose my life's chance and all my heart's desire for someone else? ¹⁶You can keep on saying no, Ettie: the day will come when you will say yes, and I'm young enough to wait."

¹⁷He was a dangerous suitor, with his glib Irish tongue, and his pretty, coaxing ways. ¹⁸There was about him also that glamour of experience and of mystery which attracts a woman's interest, and finally her love. ¹⁹He could talk of the sweet valleys of County Monaghan from which he came, of the lovely, distant island, the low hills and green meadows of which seemed the more beautiful when imagination viewed them from this place of grime and snow.

²⁰Then he was versed in the life of the cities of the North, of Detroit, and the lumber camps of Michigan, and finally of Chicago, where he had worked in a planing mill. ²¹And afterwards came the hint of romance, the feeling that strange things had happened to him in that great city, so strange and so intimate that they might not be spoken of. ²²He spoke wistfully of a sudden leaving, a breaking of old ties, a flight into a strange world, ending in this dreary valley, and Ettie listened, her dark eyes gleaming with pity and with sympathy—those two qualities which may turn so rapidly and so naturally to love.

²³McMurdo had obtained a temporary job as bookkeeper; for he was a well-educated man. ²⁴This kept him out most of the day, and he had not found occasion yet to report himself to the head of the lodge of the Eminent Order of Freeman. ²⁵He was reminded of his omission, however, by a visit one evening from Mike Scanlan, the fellow member whom he had met in the train. ²⁶Scanlan, the small, sharp-faced, nervous, black-eyed man, seemed glad to see him once more. ²⁷After a glass or two of whisky he broached the object of his visit.

²⁸"Say, McMurdo," said he, "I remembered your address, so I made bold to call. ²⁹I'm surprised that you've not reported to the Bodymaster. ³⁰Why haven't you seen Boss McGinty yet?"

³¹"Well, I had to find a job. ³²I have been busy."

³³"You must find time for him if you have none for anything else. ³⁴Good Lord, man! you're a fool not to have been down to the Union House and registered your name the first morning after you came here! ³⁵If you run against him—well, you mustn't, that's all!"

³⁶McMurdo showed mild surprise. ³⁷"I've been a member of the lodge for over two years, Scanlan, but I never heard that duties were so pressing as all that."

³⁸"Maybe not in Chicago."

³⁹"Well, it's the same society here."

⁴⁰"Is it?"

⁴¹Scanlan looked at him long and fixedly. ⁴²There was something sinister in his eyes.

⁴³"Isn't it?"

⁴⁴"You'll tell me that in a month's time. ⁴⁵I hear you had a talk with the patrolmen after I left the train."

⁴⁶"How did you know that?"

⁴⁷"Oh, it got about—things do get about for good and for bad in this district."

⁴⁸"Well, yes. ⁴⁹I told the hounds what I thought of them."

⁵⁰"By the Lord, you'll be a man after McGinty's heart!"

⁵¹"What, does he hate the police too?"

⁵²Scanlan burst out laughing. ⁵³"You go and see him, my lad," said he as he took his leave. ⁵⁴"It's not the police but you that he'll hate if you don't! ⁵⁵Now, take a friend's advice and go at once!"

⁵⁶It chanced that on the same evening McMurdo had another more pressing interview which urged him in the same direction. ⁵⁷It may have been that his attentions to Ettie had been more evident than before, or that they had gradually obtruded themselves into the slow mind of his good German host; but, whatever the cause, the boarding-house keeper beckoned the young man into his private room and started on the subject without any circumlocution.

⁵⁸"It seems to me, mister," said he, "that you are gettin' set on my Ettie. ⁵⁹Ain't that so, or am I wrong?"

⁶⁰"Yes, that is so," the young man answered.

⁶¹"Vell, I vant to tell you right now that it ain't no manner of use. ⁶²There's someone slipped in afore you."

⁶³"She told me so."

⁶⁴"Vell, you can lay that she told you truth. ⁶⁵But did she tell you who it vas?"

⁶⁶"No, I asked her; but she wouldn't tell."

⁶⁷"I dare say not, the leetle baggage! ⁶⁸Perhaps she did not vish to frighten you away."

⁶⁹"Frighten!" ⁷⁰McMurdo was on fire in a moment.

⁷¹"Ah, yes, my friend! ⁷²You need not be ashamed to be frightened of him. ⁷³It is Teddy Baldwin."

⁷⁴"And who the devil is he?"

⁷⁵"He is a boss of Scowrers."

⁷⁶"Scowrers! ⁷⁷I've heard of them before. ⁷⁸It's Scowrers here and Scowrers there, and always in a whisper! ⁷⁹What are you all afraid of? ⁸⁰Who are the Scowrers?"

⁸¹The boarding-house keeper instinctively sank his voice, as everyone did who talked about that terrible society. ⁸²“The Scowrers,” said he, “are the Eminent Order of Freeman!”

⁸³The young man stared. ⁸⁴“Why, I am a member of that order myself.”

⁸⁵“You! ⁸⁶I would never have had you in my house if I had known it—not if you vere to pay me a hundred dollar a week.”

⁸⁶“What's wrong with the order? ⁸⁷It's for charity and good fellowship. ⁸⁸The rules say so.”

⁸⁹“Maybe in some places. ⁹⁰Not here!”

⁹¹“What is it here?”

⁹²“It's a murder society, that's vat it is.”

⁹³McMurdo laughed incredulously. ⁹⁴“How can you prove that?” he asked.

⁹⁵“Prove it! ⁹⁶Are there not fifty murders to prove it? ⁹⁷Vat about Milman and Van Shorst, and the Nicholson family, and old Mr. Hyam, and little Billy James, and the others? ⁹⁸Prove it! ⁹⁹Is there a man or a voman in this valley vat does not know it?”

¹⁰⁰“See here!” said McMurdo earnestly. ¹⁰¹“I want you to take back what you've said, or else make it good. ¹⁰²One or the other you must do before I quit this room. ¹⁰³Put yourself in my place. ¹⁰⁴Here am I, a stranger in the town. ¹⁰⁵I belong to a society that I know only as an innocent one. ¹⁰⁶You'll find it through the length and breadth of the States, but always as an innocent one. ¹⁰⁷Now, when I am counting upon joining it here, you tell me that it is the same as a murder society called the Scowrers. ¹⁰⁸I guess you owe me either an apology or else an explanation, Mr. Shafter.”

¹⁰⁹“I can but tell you vat the whole world knows, mister. ¹¹⁰The bosses of the one are the bosses of the other. ¹¹¹If you offend the one, it is the other vat vill strike you. ¹¹²We have proved it too often.”

¹¹³“That's just gossip—I want proof!” said McMurdo.

¹¹⁴“If you live here long you vill get your proof. ¹¹⁵But I forget that you are yourself one of them. ¹¹⁶You vill soon be as bad as the rest. ¹¹⁷But you vill find other lodgings, mister. ¹¹⁸I cannot have you here. ¹¹⁹Is it not bad enough that one of these people come courting my Ettie, and that I dare not turn him down, but that I should have another for my boarder? ¹²⁰Yes, indeed, you shall not sleep here after to-night!”

¹²¹McMurdo found himself under sentence of banishment both from his comfortable quarters and from the girl whom he loved. ¹²²He found her alone in the sitting-room that same evening, and he poured his troubles into her ear.

¹²³“Sure, your father is after giving me notice,” he said. ¹²⁴“It's little I would care if it was just my room, but indeed, Ettie, though it's only a week that I've known you, you are the very breath of life to me, and I can't live without you!”

¹²⁵“Oh, hush, Mr. McMurdo, don't speak so!” said the girl. ¹²⁶“I have told you, have I not, that you are too late? ¹²⁷There is another, and if I have not promised to marry him at once, at least I can promise no one else.”

¹²⁸“Suppose I had been first, Ettie, would I have had a chance?”

¹²⁹The girl sank her face into her hands. ¹³⁰“I wish to heaven that you had been first!” she sobbed.

¹³¹McMurdo was down on his knees before her in an instant. ¹³²“For God's sake, Ettie, let it stand at that!” he cried. ¹³³“Will you ruin your life and my own for the sake of this promise? ¹³⁴Follow your heart, acushla! ¹³⁵Tis a safer guide than any promise before you knew what it was that you were saying.”

¹³⁶He had seized Ettie's white hand between his own strong brown ones.

¹³⁷"Say that you will be mine, and we will face it out together!"

¹³⁸"Not here?"

¹³⁹"Yes, here."

¹⁴⁰"No, no, Jack!" ¹⁴¹His arms were round her now. ¹⁴²"It could not be here. ¹⁴³Could you take me away?"

¹⁴⁴A struggle passed for a moment over McMurdo's face; but it ended by setting like granite. ¹⁴⁵"No, here," he said. ¹⁴⁶"I'll hold you against the world, Ettie, right here where we are!"

¹⁴⁷"Why should we not leave together?"

¹⁴⁸"No, Ettie, I can't leave here."

¹⁴⁹"But why?"

¹⁵⁰"I'd never hold my head up again if I felt that I had been driven out. ¹⁵¹Besides, what is there to be afraid of? ¹⁵²Are we not free folks in a free country? ¹⁵³If you love me, and I you, who will dare to come between?"

¹⁵⁴"You don't know, Jack. ¹⁵⁵You've been here too short a time. ¹⁵⁶You don't know this Baldwin. ¹⁵⁷You don't know McGinty and his Scowrsers."

¹⁵⁸"No, I don't know them, and I don't fear them, and I don't believe in them!" said McMurdo. ¹⁵⁹"I've lived among rough men, my darling, and instead of fearing them it has always ended that they have feared me—always, Ettie. ¹⁶⁰It's mad on the face of it! ¹⁶¹If these men, as your father says, have done crime after crime in the valley, and if everyone knows them by name, how comes it that none are brought to justice? ¹⁶²You answer me that, Ettie!"

¹⁶³"Because no witness dares to appear against them. ¹⁶⁴He would not live a month if he did. ¹⁶⁵Also because they have always their own men to swear that the accused one was far from the scene of the crime. ¹⁶⁶But surely, Jack, you must have read all this. ¹⁶⁷I had understood that every paper in the United States was writing about it."

¹⁶⁸"Well, I have read something, it is true; but I had thought it was a story. ¹⁶⁹Maybe these men have some reason in what they do. ¹⁷⁰Maybe they are wronged and have no other way to help themselves."

¹⁷¹"Oh, Jack, don't let me hear you speak so! ¹⁷²That is how he speaks—the other one!"

¹⁷³"Baldwin—he speaks like that, does he?"

¹⁷⁴"And that is why I loathe him so. ¹⁷⁵Oh, Jack, now I can tell you the truth. ¹⁷⁶I loathe him with all my heart; but I fear him also. ¹⁷⁷I fear him for myself; but above all I fear him for father. ¹⁷⁸I know that some great sorrow would come upon us if I dared to say what I really felt. ¹⁷⁹That is why I have put him off with half-promises. ¹⁸⁰It was in real truth our only hope. ¹⁸¹But if you would fly with me, Jack, we could take father with us and live forever far from the power of these wicked men."

¹⁸²Again there was the struggle upon McMurdo's face, and again it set like granite. ¹⁸³"No harm shall come to you, Ettie—nor to your father either. ¹⁸⁴As to wicked men, I expect you may find that I am as bad as the worst of them before we're through."

¹⁸⁵"No, no, Jack! ¹⁸⁶I would trust you anywhere."

¹⁸⁷McMurdo laughed bitterly. ¹⁸⁸"Good Lord! how little you know of me! ¹⁸⁹Your innocent soul, my darling, could not even guess what is passing in mine. ¹⁹⁰But, hullo, who's the visitor?"

¹⁹¹The door had opened suddenly, and a young fellow came swaggering in with the air of one who is the master. ¹⁹²He was a handsome, dashing young man of about the same age and build as McMurdo himself. ¹⁹³Under his broad-brimmed black felt hat, which he had not troubled to remove, a handsome face with fierce, domineering eyes and a curved hawk-bill of a nose looked savagely at the pair who sat by the stove.

¹⁹⁴Ettie had jumped to her feet full of confusion and alarm. ¹⁹⁵"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Baldwin," said she. ¹⁹⁶"You're earlier than I had thought. ¹⁹⁷Come and sit down."

¹⁹⁸Baldwin stood with his hands on his hips looking at McMurdo. ¹⁹⁹"Who is this?" he asked curtly.

²⁰⁰"It's a friend of mine, Mr. Baldwin, a new boarder here. ²⁰¹Mr. McMurdo, may I introduce you to Mr. Baldwin?"

²⁰²The young men nodded in surly fashion to each other.

²⁰³"Maybe Miss Ettie has told you how it is with us?" said Baldwin.

²⁰⁴"I didn't understand that there was any relation between you."

²⁰⁵"Didn't you? ²⁰⁶Well, you can understand it now. ²⁰⁷You can take it from me that this young lady is mine, and you'll find it a very fine evening for a walk."

²⁰⁸"Thank you, I am in no humour for a walk."

²⁰⁹"Aren't you?" ²¹⁰The man's savage eyes were blazing with anger. ²¹¹"Maybe you are in a humour for a fight, Mr. Boarder!"

²¹²"That I am!" cried McMurdo, springing to his feet. ²¹³"You never said a more welcome word."

²¹⁴"For God's sake, Jack! ²¹⁵Oh, for God's sake!" cried poor, distracted Ettie. ²¹⁶"Oh, Jack, Jack, he will hurt you!"

²¹⁷"Oh, it's Jack, is it?" said Baldwin with an oath. ²¹⁸"You've come to that already, have you?"

²¹⁹"Oh, Ted, be reasonable—be kind! ²²⁰For my sake, Ted, if ever you loved me, be big-hearted and forgiving!"

²²¹"I think, Ettie, that if you were to leave us alone we could get this thing settled," said McMurdo quietly. ²²²"Or maybe, Mr. Baldwin, you will take a turn down the street with me. ²²³It's a fine evening, and there's some open ground beyond the next block."

²²⁴"I'll get even with you without needing to dirty my hands," said his enemy. ²²⁵"You'll wish you had never set foot in this house before I am through with you!"

²²⁶"No time like the present," cried McMurdo.

²²⁷"I'll choose my own time, mister. ²²⁸You can leave the time to me. ²²⁹See here!" ²³⁰He suddenly rolled up his sleeve and showed upon his forearm a peculiar sign which appeared to have been branded there.

²³¹It was a circle with a triangle within it. ²³²"D'you know what that means?"

²³³"I neither know nor care!"

²³⁴"Well, you will know, I'll promise you that. ²³⁵You won't be much older, either. ²³⁶Perhaps Miss Ettie can tell you something about it. ²³⁷As to you, Ettie, you'll come back to me on your knees—d'ye hear, girl?—on your knees—and then I'll tell you what your punishment may be. ²³⁸You've sowed—and by the Lord, I'll see that you reap!" ²³⁹He glanced at them both in fury. ²⁴⁰Then he turned upon his heel, and an instant later the outer door had banged behind him.

²⁴¹For a few moments McMurdo and the girl stood in silence. ²⁴²Then she threw her arms around him.

²⁴³“Oh, Jack, how brave you were! ²⁴⁴But it is no use, you must fly! ²⁴⁵To-night—Jack—to-night! ²⁴⁶It's your only hope. ²⁴⁷He will have your life. ²⁴⁸I read it in his horrible eyes. ²⁴⁹What chance have you against a dozen of them, with Boss McGinty and all the power of the lodge behind them?”

²⁵⁰McMurdo disengaged her hands, kissed her, and gently pushed her back into a chair. ²⁵¹“There, acushla, there! ²⁵²Don't be disturbed or fear for me. ²⁵³I'm a Freeman myself. ²⁵⁴I'm after telling your father about it. ²⁵⁵Maybe I am no better than the others; so don't make a saint of me. ²⁵⁶Perhaps you hate me too, now that I've told you as much?”

²⁵⁷“Hate you, Jack? ²⁵⁸While life lasts I could never do that! ²⁵⁹I've heard that there is no harm in being a Freeman anywhere but here; so why should I think the worse of you for that? ²⁶⁰But if you are a Freeman, Jack, why should you not go down and make a friend of Boss McGinty? ²⁶¹Oh, hurry, Jack, hurry! ²⁶²Get your word in first, or the hounds will be on your trail.”

²⁶³“I was thinking the same thing,” said McMurdo. ²⁶⁴“I'll go right now and fix it. ²⁶⁵You can tell your father that I'll sleep here to-night and find some other quarters in the morning.”

²⁶⁶The bar of McGinty's saloon was crowded as usual, for it was the favourite loafing place of all the rougher elements of the town. ²⁶⁷The man was popular; for he had a rough, jovial disposition which formed a mask, covering a great deal which lay behind it. ²⁶⁸But apart from this popularity, the fear in which he was held throughout the township, and indeed down the whole thirty miles of the valley and past the mountains on each side of it, was enough in itself to fill his bar; for none could afford to neglect his good will.

²⁶⁹Besides those secret powers which it was universally believed that he exercised in so pitiless a fashion, he was a high public official, a municipal councillor, and a commissioner of roads, elected to the office through the votes of the ruffians who in turn expected to receive favours at his hands. ²⁷⁰Assessments and taxes were enormous; the public works were notoriously neglected, the accounts were slurred over by bribed auditors, and the decent citizen was terrorized into paying public blackmail, and holding his tongue lest some worse thing befall him.

²⁷¹Thus it was that, year by year, Boss McGinty's diamond pins became more obtrusive, his gold chains more weighty across a more gorgeous vest, and his saloon stretched farther and farther, until it threatened to absorb one whole side of the Market Square.

²⁷²McMurdo pushed open the swinging door of the saloon and made his way amid the crowd of men within, through an atmosphere blurred with tobacco smoke and heavy with the smell of spirits. ²⁷³The place was brilliantly lighted, and the huge, heavily gilt mirrors upon every wall reflected and multiplied the garish illumination. ²⁷⁴There were several bartenders in their shirt sleeves, hard at work mixing drinks for the loungers who frequented the broad, brass-trimmed counter.

²⁷⁵At the far end, with his body resting upon the bar and a cigar stuck at an acute angle from the corner of his mouth, stood a tall, strong, heavily built man who could be none other than the famous McGinty himself. ²⁷⁶He was a black-maned giant, bearded to the cheek-bones, and with a shock of raven hair which fell to his collar. ²⁷⁷His complexion was as swarthy as that of an Italian, and his eyes were of a strange dead black, which, combined with a slight squint, gave them a particularly sinister appearance.

²⁷⁸All else in the man—his noble proportions, his fine features, and his frank bearing—fitted in with that jovial, man-to-man manner which he affected. ²⁷⁹Here, one would say, is a bluff, honest fellow, whose heart would be sound however rude his outspoken words might seem. ²⁸⁰It was only when those dead, dark eyes, deep and remorseless, were turned upon a man that he shrank within himself, feeling that he was face to face with an infinite possibility of latent evil, with a strength and courage and cunning behind it which made it a thousand times more deadly.

²⁸¹Having had a good look at his man, McMurdo elbowed his way forward with his usual careless audacity, and pushed himself through the little group of courtiers who were fawning upon the powerful boss, laughing uproariously at the smallest of his jokes. ²⁸²The young stranger's bold gray eyes looked back fearlessly through their glasses at the deadly black ones which turned sharply upon him.

²⁸³"Well, young man, I can't call your face to mind."

²⁸⁴"I'm new here, Mr. McGinty."

²⁸⁵"You are not so new that you can't give a gentleman his proper title."

²⁸⁶"He's Councillor McGinty, young man," said a voice from the group.

²⁸⁷"I'm sorry, Councillor. ²⁸⁸I'm strange to the ways of the place. ²⁸⁹But I was advised to see you."

²⁹⁰"Well, you see me. ²⁹¹This is all there is. ²⁹²What d'you think of me?"

²⁹³"Well, it's early days. ²⁹⁴If your heart is as big as your body, and your soul as fine as your face, then I'd ask for nothing better," said McMurdo.

²⁹⁵"By Gar! you've got an Irish tongue in your head anyhow," cried the saloon-keeper, not quite certain whether to humour this audacious visitor or to stand upon his dignity.

²⁹⁶"So you are good enough to pass my appearance?"

²⁹⁷"Sure," said McMurdo.

²⁹⁸"And you were told to see me?"

²⁹⁹"I was."

³⁰⁰"And who told you?"

³⁰¹"Brother Scanlan of Lodge 341, Vermissa. ³⁰²I drink your health Councillor, and to our better acquaintance." ³⁰³He raised a glass with which he had been served to his lips and elevated his little finger as he drank it.

³⁰⁴McGinty, who had been watching him narrowly, raised his thick black eyebrows. ³⁰⁵"Oh, it's like that, is it?" said he. ³⁰⁶"I'll have to look a bit closer into this, Mister—"

³⁰⁷"McMurdo."

³⁰⁸"A bit closer, Mr. McMurdo; for we don't take folk on trust in these parts, nor believe all we're told neither. ³⁰⁹Come in here for a moment, behind the bar."

³¹⁰There was a small room there, lined with barrels. ³¹¹McGinty carefully closed the door, and then seated himself on one of them, biting thoughtfully on his cigar and surveying his companion with those disquieting eyes. ³¹²For a couple of minutes he sat in complete silence. ³¹³McMurdo bore the inspection cheerfully, one hand in his coat pocket, the other twisting his brown moustache. ³¹⁴Suddenly McGinty stooped and produced a wicked-looking revolver.

³¹⁵"See here, my joker," said he, "if I thought you were playing any game on us, it would be short work for you."

³¹⁶"This is a strange welcome," McMurdo answered with some dignity, "for the Bodymaster of a lodge of Freemen to give to a stranger brother."

³¹⁷"Ay, but it's just that same that you have to prove," said McGinty, "and God help you if you fail!"

³¹⁸"Where were you made?"

³¹⁹“Lodge 29, Chicago.”

³²⁰“When?”

³²¹“June 24, 1872.”

³²²“What Bodymaster?”

³²³“James H. Scott.”

³²⁴“Who is your district ruler?”

³²⁵“Bartholomew Wilson.”

³²⁶“Hum! ³²⁷You seem glib enough in your tests. ³²⁸What are you doing here?”

³²⁹“Working, the same as you—but a poorer job.”

³³⁰“You have your back answer quick enough.”

³³¹“Yes, I was always quick of speech.”

³³²“Are you quick of action?”

³³³“I have had that name among those that knew me best.”

³³⁴“Well, we may try you sooner than you think. ³³⁵Have you heard anything of the lodge in these parts?”

³³⁶“I’ve heard that it takes a man to be a brother.”

³³⁷“True for you, Mr. McMurdo. ³³⁸Why did you leave Chicago?”

³³⁹“I’m damned if I tell you that!”

³⁴⁰McGinty opened his eyes. ³⁴¹He was not used to being answered in such fashion, and it amused him.

³⁴²“Why won’t you tell me?”

³⁴³“Because no brother may tell another a lie.”

³⁴⁴“Then the truth is too bad to tell?”

³⁴⁵“You can put it that way if you like.”

³⁴⁶“See here, mister, you can’t expect me, as Bodymaster, to pass into the lodge a man for whose past he can’t answer.”

³⁴⁷McMurdo looked puzzled. ³⁴⁸Then he took a worn newspaper cutting from an inner pocket.

³⁴⁹“You wouldn’t squeal on a fellow?” said he.

³⁵⁰“I’ll wipe my hand across your face if you say such words to me!” cried McGinty hotly.

³⁵¹“You are right, Councillor,” said McMurdo meekly. ³⁵²“I should apologize. ³⁵³I spoke without thought. ³⁵⁴Well, I know that I am safe in your hands. ³⁵⁵Look at that clipping.”

³⁵⁶McGinty glanced his eyes over the account of the shooting of one Jonas Pinto, in the Lake Saloon, Market Street, Chicago, in the New Year week of 1874.

³⁵⁷“Your work?” he asked, as he handed back the paper.

³⁵⁸McMurdo nodded.

³⁵⁹“Why did you shoot him?”

³⁶⁰“I was helping Uncle Sam to make dollars. ³⁶¹Maybe mine were not as good gold as his, but they looked as well and were cheaper to make. ³⁶²This man Pinto helped me to shove the queer—”

³⁶³“To do what?”

³⁶⁴“Well, it means to pass the dollars out into circulation. ³⁶⁵Then he said he would split. ³⁶⁶Maybe he did split. ³⁶⁷I didn't wait to see. ³⁶⁸I just killed him and lighted out for the coal country.”

³⁶⁹“Why the coal country?”

³⁷⁰“Cause I'd read in the papers that they weren't too particular in those parts.”

³⁷¹McGinty laughed. ³⁷²“You were first a coiner and then a murderer, and you came to these parts because you thought you'd be welcome.”

³⁷³“That's about the size of it,” McMurdo answered.

³⁷⁴“Well, I guess you'll go far. ³⁷⁵Say, can you make those dollars yet?”

³⁷⁶McMurdo took half a dozen from his pocket. ³⁷⁷“Those never passed the Philadelphia mint,” said he.

³⁷⁸“You don't say!” ³⁷⁹McGinty held them to the light in his enormous hand, which was hairy as a gorilla's. ³⁸⁰“I can see no difference. ³⁸¹Gar! you'll be a mighty useful brother, I'm thinking! ³⁸²We can do with a bad man or two among us, Friend McMurdo: for there are times when we have to take our own part. ³⁸³We'd soon be against the wall if we didn't shove back at those that were pushing us.”

³⁸⁴“Well, I guess I'll do my share of shoving with the rest of the boys.”

³⁸⁵“You seem to have a good nerve. ³⁸⁶You didn't squirm when I shoved this gun at you.”

³⁸⁷“It was not me that was in danger.”

³⁸⁸“Who then?”

³⁸⁹“It was you, Councillor.” ³⁹⁰McMurdo drew a cocked pistol from the side pocket of his peajacket.

³⁹¹“I was covering you all the time. ³⁹²I guess my shot would have been as quick as yours.”

³⁹³“By Gar!” ³⁹⁴McGinty flushed an angry red and then burst into a roar of laughter. ³⁹⁵“Say, we've had no such holy terror come to hand this many a year. ³⁹⁶I reckon the lodge will learn to be proud of you ... ³⁹⁷Well, what the hell do you want? ³⁹⁸And can't I speak alone with a gentleman for five minutes but you must butt in on us?”

³⁹⁹The bartender stood abashed. ⁴⁰⁰“I'm sorry, Councillor, but it's Ted Baldwin. ⁴⁰¹He says he must see you this very minute.”

⁴⁰²The message was unnecessary; for the set, cruel face of the man himself was looking over the servant's shoulder. ⁴⁰³He pushed the bartender out and closed the door on him.

⁴⁰⁴“So,” said he with a furious glance at McMurdo, “you got here first, did you? ⁴⁰⁵I've a word to say to you, Councillor, about this man.”

⁴⁰⁶“Then say it here and now before my face,” cried McMurdo.

⁴⁰⁷“I'll say it at my own time, in my own way.”

⁴⁰⁸“Tut! Tut!” said McGinty, getting off his barrel. ⁴⁰⁹“This will never do. ⁴¹⁰We have a new brother here, Baldwin, and it's not for us to greet him in such fashion. ⁴¹¹Hold out your hand, man, and make it up!”

⁴¹²“Never!” cried Baldwin in a fury.

⁴¹³"I've offered to fight him if he thinks I have wronged him," said McMurdo. ⁴¹⁴"I'll fight him with fists, or, if that won't satisfy him, I'll fight him any other way he chooses. ⁴¹⁵Now, I'll leave it to you, Councillor, to judge between us as a Bodymaster should."

⁴¹⁶"What is it, then?"

⁴¹⁷"A young lady. ⁴¹⁸She's free to choose for herself."

⁴¹⁹"Is she?" cried Baldwin.

⁴²⁰"As between two brothers of the lodge I should say that she was," said the Boss.

⁴²¹"Oh, that's your ruling, is it?"

⁴²²"Yes, it is, Ted Baldwin," said McGinty, with a wicked stare. ⁴²³"Is it you that would dispute it?"

⁴²⁴"You would throw over one that has stood by you this five years in favour of a man that you never saw before in your life? ⁴²⁵You're not Bodymaster for life, Jack McGinty, and by God! when next it comes to a vote—"

⁴²⁶The Councillor sprang at him like a tiger. ⁴²⁷His hand closed round the other's neck, and he hurled him back across one of the barrels. ⁴²⁸In his mad fury he would have squeezed the life out of him if McMurdo had not interfered.

⁴²⁹"Easy, Councillor! ⁴³⁰For heaven's sake, go easy!" he cried, as he dragged him back.

⁴³¹McGinty released his hold, and Baldwin, cowed and shaken gasping for breath, and shivering in every limb, as one who has looked over the very edge of death, sat up on the barrel over which he had been hurled.

⁴³²"You've been asking for it this many a day, Ted Baldwin—now you've got it!" cried McGinty, his huge chest rising and falling. ⁴³³"Maybe you think if I was voted down from Bodymaster you would find yourself in my shoes. ⁴³⁴It's for the lodge to say that. ⁴³⁵But so long as I am the chief I'll have no man lift his voice against me or my rulings."

⁴³⁶"I have nothing against you," mumbled Baldwin, feeling his throat.

⁴³⁷"Well, then," cried the other, relapsing in a moment into a bluff joviality, "we are all good friends again and there's an end of the matter."

⁴³⁸He took a bottle of champagne down from the shelf and twisted out the cork.

⁴³⁹"See now," he continued, as he filled three high glasses. ⁴⁴⁰"Let us drink the quarrelling toast of the lodge. ⁴⁴¹After that, as you know, there can be no bad blood between us. ⁴⁴²Now, then the left hand on the apple of my throat. ⁴⁴³I say to you, Ted Baldwin, what is the offense, sir?"

⁴⁴⁴"The clouds are heavy," answered Baldwin.

⁴⁴⁵"But they will forever brighten."

⁴⁴⁶"And this I swear!"

⁴⁴⁷The men drank their glasses, and the same ceremony was performed between Baldwin and McMurdo.

⁴⁴⁸"There!" cried McGinty, rubbing his hands. ⁴⁴⁹"That's the end of the black blood. ⁴⁵⁰You come under lodge discipline if it goes further, and that's a heavy hand in these parts, as Brother Baldwin knows—and as you will damn soon find out, Brother McMurdo, if you ask for trouble!"

⁴⁵¹“Faith, I'd be slow to do that,” said McMurdo. ⁴⁵²He held out his hand to Baldwin. ⁴⁵³“I'm quick to quarrel and quick to forgive. ⁴⁵⁴It's my hot Irish blood, they tell me. ⁴⁵⁵But it's over for me, and I bear no grudge.”

⁴⁵⁶Baldwin had to take the proffered hand, for the baleful eye of the terrible Boss was upon him. ⁴⁵⁷But his sullen face showed how little the words of the other had moved him.

⁴⁵⁸McGinty clapped them both on the shoulders. ⁴⁵⁹“Tut! ⁴⁶⁰These girls! ⁴⁶¹These girls!” he cried. ⁴⁶²“To think that the same petticoats should come between two of my boys! ⁴⁶³It's the devil's own luck! ⁴⁶⁴Well, it's the colleen inside of them that must settle the question for it's outside the jurisdiction of a Bodymaster—and the Lord be praised for that! ⁴⁶⁵We have enough on us, without the women as well. ⁴⁶⁶You'll have to be affiliated to Lodge 341, Brother McMurdo. ⁴⁶⁷We have our own ways and methods, different from Chicago. ⁴⁶⁸Saturday night is our meeting, and if you come then, we'll make you free forever of the Vermissa Valley.”

Chapter X.

Lodge 341, Vermissa

¹On the day following the evening which had contained so many exciting events, McMurdo moved his lodgings from old Jacob Shafter's and took up his quarters at the Widow MacNamara's on the extreme outskirts of the town. ²Scanlan, his original acquaintance aboard the train, had occasion shortly afterwards to move into Vermissa, and the two lodged together. ³There was no other boarder, and the hostess was an easy-going old Irishwoman who left them to themselves; so that they had a freedom for speech and action welcome to men who had secrets in common.

⁴Shafter had relented to the extent of letting McMurdo come to his meals there when he liked; so that his intercourse with Ettie was by no means broken. ⁵On the contrary, it drew closer and more intimate as the weeks went by.

⁶In his bedroom at his new abode McMurdo felt it safe to take out the coining moulds, and under many a pledge of secrecy a number of brothers from the lodge were allowed to come in and see them, each carrying away in his pocket some examples of the false money, so cunningly struck that there was never the slightest difficulty or danger in passing it. ⁷Why, with such a wonderful art at his command, McMurdo should condescend to work at all was a perpetual mystery to his companions; though he made it clear to anyone who asked him that if he lived without any visible means it would very quickly bring the police upon his track.

⁸One policeman was indeed after him already; but the incident, as luck would have it, did the adventurer a great deal more good than harm. ⁹After the first introduction there were few evenings when he did not find his way to McGinty's saloon, there to make closer acquaintance with "the boys," which was the jovial title by which the dangerous gang who infested the place were known to one another. ¹⁰His dashing manner and fearlessness of speech made him a favourite with them all; while the rapid and scientific way in which he polished off his antagonist in an "all in" bar-room scrap earned the respect of that rough community. ¹¹Another incident, however, raised him even higher in their estimation.

¹²Just at the crowded hour one night, the door opened and a man entered with the quiet blue uniform and peaked cap of the mine police. ¹³This was a special body raised by the railways and colliery owners to supplement the efforts of the ordinary civil police, who were perfectly helpless in the face of the organized ruffianism which terrorized the district. ¹⁴There was a hush as he entered, and many a curious glance was cast at him; but the relations between policemen and criminals are peculiar in some parts of the States, and McGinty himself standing behind his counter, showed no surprise when the policeman enrolled himself among his customers.

¹⁵"A straight whisky, for the night is bitter," said the police officer. ¹⁶"I don't think we have met before, Councillor?"

¹⁷"You'll be the new captain?" said McGinty.

¹⁸"That's so. ¹⁹We're looking to you, Councillor, and to the other leading citizens, to help us in upholding law and order in this township. ²⁰Captain Marvin is my name."

²¹"We'd do better without you, Captain Marvin," said McGinty coldly; "for we have our own police of the township, and no need for any imported goods. ²²What are you but the paid tool of the capitalists, hired by them to club or shoot your poorer fellow citizen?"

²³"Well, well, we won't argue about that," said the police officer good-humouredly. ²⁴"I expect we all do our duty same as we see it; but we can't all see it the same." ²⁵He had drunk off his glass and had

turned to go, when his eyes fell upon the face of Jack McMurdo, who was scowling at his elbow. ²⁶“Hullo! ²⁷Hullo!” he cried, looking him up and down. ²⁸“Here's an old acquaintance!”

²⁹McMurdo shrank away from him. ³⁰“I was never a friend to you nor any other cursed copper in my life,” said he.

³¹“An acquaintance isn't always a friend,” said the police captain, grinning. ³²“You're Jack McMurdo of Chicago, right enough, and don't you deny it!”

³³McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. ³⁴“I'm not denying it,” said he. ³⁵“D'ye think I'm ashamed of my own name?”

³⁶“You've got good cause to be, anyhow.”

³⁷“What the devil d'you mean by that?” he roared with his fists clenched.

³⁸“No, no, Jack, bluster won't do with me. ³⁹I was an officer in Chicago before ever I came to this darned coal bunker, and I know a Chicago crook when I see one.”

⁴⁰McMurdo's face fell. ⁴¹“Don't tell me that you're Marvin of the Chicago Central!” he cried.

⁴²“Just the same old Teddy Marvin, at your service. ⁴³We haven't forgotten the shooting of Jonas Pinto up there.”

⁴⁴“I never shot him.”

⁴⁵“Did you not? ⁴⁶That's good impartial evidence, ain't it? ⁴⁷Well, his death came in uncommon handy for you, or they would have had you for shoving the queer. ⁴⁸Well, we can let that be bygones; for, between you and me—and perhaps I'm going further than my duty in saying it—they could get no clear case against you, and Chicago's open to you to-morrow.”

⁴⁹“I'm very well where I am.”

⁵⁰“Well, I've given you the pointer, and you're a sulky dog not to thank me for it.”

⁵¹“Well, I suppose you mean well, and I do thank you,” said McMurdo in no very gracious manner.

⁵²“It's mum with me so long as I see you living on the straight,” said the captain. ⁵³“But, by the Lord! if you get off after this, it's another story! ⁵⁴So good-night to you—and goodnight, Councillor.”

⁵⁵He left the bar-room; but not before he had created a local hero. ⁵⁶McMurdo's deeds in far Chicago had been whispered before. ⁵⁷He had put off all questions with a smile, as one who did not wish to have greatness thrust upon him. ⁵⁸But now the thing was officially confirmed. ⁵⁹The bar loafers crowded round him and shook him heartily by the hand. ⁶⁰He was free of the community from that time on. ⁶¹He could drink hard and show little trace of it; but that evening, had his mate Scanlan not been at hand to lead him home, the feted hero would surely have spent his night under the bar.

⁶²On a Saturday night McMurdo was introduced to the lodge. ⁶³He had thought to pass in without ceremony as being an initiate of Chicago; but there were particular rites in Vermissa of which they were proud, and these had to be undergone by every postulant. ⁶⁴The assembly met in a large room reserved for such purposes at the Union House. ⁶⁵Some sixty members assembled at Vermissa; but that by no means represented the full strength of the organization, for there were several other lodges in the valley, and others across the mountains on each side, who exchanged members when any serious business was afoot, so that a crime might be done by men who were strangers to the locality. ⁶⁶Altogether there were not less than five hundred scattered over the coal district.

⁶⁷In the bare assembly room the men were gathered round a long table. ⁶⁸At the side was a second one laden with bottles and glasses, on which some members of the company were already turning their eyes.

⁶⁹McGinty sat at the head with a flat black velvet cap upon his shock of tangled black hair, and a coloured purple stole round his neck, so that he seemed to be a priest presiding over some diabolical ritual. ⁷⁰To right and left of him were the higher lodge officials, the cruel, handsome face of Ted Baldwin among them. ⁷¹Each of these wore some scarf or medallion as emblem of his office.

⁷²They were, for the most part, men of mature age; but the rest of the company consisted of young fellows from eighteen to twenty-five, the ready and capable agents who carried out the commands of their seniors. ⁷³Among the older men were many whose features showed the tigerish, lawless souls within; but looking at the rank and file it was difficult to believe that these eager and open-faced young fellows were in very truth a dangerous gang of murderers, whose minds had suffered such complete moral perversion that they took a horrible pride in their proficiency at the business, and looked with deepest respect at the man who had the reputation of making what they called “a clean job.”

⁷⁴To their contorted natures it had become a spirited and chivalrous thing to volunteer for service against some man who had never injured them, and whom in many cases they had never seen in their lives.

⁷⁵The crime committed, they quarrelled as to who had actually struck the fatal blow, and amused one another and the company by describing the cries and contortions of the murdered man.

⁷⁶At first they had shown some secrecy in their arrangements; but at the time which this narrative describes their proceedings were extraordinarily open, for the repeated failures of the law had proved to them that, on the one hand, no one would dare to witness against them, and on the other they had an unlimited number of staunch witnesses upon whom they could call, and a well-filled treasure chest from which they could draw the funds to engage the best legal talent in the state. ⁷⁷In ten long years of outrage there had been no single conviction, and the only danger that ever threatened the Scowrers lay in the victim himself—who, however outnumbered and taken by surprise, might and occasionally did leave his mark upon his assailants.

⁷⁸McMurdo had been warned that some ordeal lay before him; but no one would tell him in what it consisted. ⁷⁹He was led now into an outer room by two solemn brothers. ⁸⁰Through the plank partition he could hear the murmur of many voices from the assembly within. ⁸¹Once or twice he caught the sound of his own name, and he knew that they were discussing his candidacy. ⁸²Then there entered an inner guard with a green and gold sash across his chest.

⁸³“The Bodymaster orders that he shall be trussed, blinded, and entered,” said he.

⁸⁴The three of them removed his coat, turned up the sleeve of his right arm, and finally passed a rope round above the elbows and made it fast. ⁸⁵They next placed a thick black cap right over his head and the upper part of his face, so that he could see nothing. ⁸⁶He was then led into the assembly hall.

⁸⁷It was pitch dark and very oppressive under his hood. ⁸⁸He heard the rustle and murmur of the people round him, and then the voice of McGinty sounded dull and distant through the covering of his ears.

⁸⁹“John McMurdo,” said the voice, “are you already a member of the Ancient Order of Freeman?”

⁹⁰He bowed in assent.

⁹¹“Is your lodge No. 29, Chicago?”

⁹²He bowed again.

⁹³“Dark nights are unpleasant,” said the voice.

⁹⁴“Yes, for strangers to travel,” he answered.

⁹⁵“The clouds are heavy.”

⁹⁶“Yes, a storm is approaching.”

⁹⁷“Are the brethren satisfied?” asked the Bodymaster.

⁹⁸There was a general murmur of assent.

⁹⁹“We know, Brother, by your sign and by your countersign that you are indeed one of us,” said McGinty. ¹⁰⁰“We would have you know, however, that in this county and in other counties of these parts we have certain rites, and also certain duties of our own which call for good men. ¹⁰¹Are you ready to be tested?”

¹⁰²“I am.”

¹⁰³“Are you of stout heart?”

¹⁰⁴“I am.”

¹⁰⁵“Take a stride forward to prove it.”

¹⁰⁶As the words were said he felt two hard points in front of his eyes, pressing upon them so that it appeared as if he could not move forward without a danger of losing them. ¹⁰⁷None the less, he nerved himself to step resolutely out, and as he did so the pressure melted away. ¹⁰⁸There was a low murmur of applause.

¹⁰⁹“He is of stout heart,” said the voice. ¹¹⁰“Can you bear pain?”

¹¹¹“As well as another,” he answered.

¹¹²“Test him!”

¹¹³It was all he could do to keep himself from screaming out, for an agonizing pain shot through his forearm. ¹¹⁴He nearly fainted at the sudden shock of it; but he bit his lip and clenched his hands to hide his agony.

¹¹⁵“I can take more than that,” said he.

¹¹⁶This time there was loud applause. ¹¹⁷A finer first appearance had never been made in the lodge. ¹¹⁸Hands clapped him on the back, and the hood was plucked from his head. ¹¹⁹He stood blinking and smiling amid the congratulations of the brothers.

¹²⁰“One last word, Brother McMurdo,” said McGinty. ¹²¹“You have already sworn the oath of secrecy and fidelity, and you are aware that the punishment for any breach of it is instant and inevitable death?”

¹²²“I am,” said McMurdo.

¹²³“And you accept the rule of the Bodymaster for the time being under all circumstances?”

¹²⁴“I do.”

¹²⁵“Then in the name of Lodge 341, Vermissa, I welcome you to its privileges and debates. ¹²⁶You will put the liquor on the table, Brother Scanlan, and we will drink to our worthy brother.”

¹²⁷McMurdo's coat had been brought to him; but before putting it on he examined his right arm, which still smarted heavily. ¹²⁸There on the flesh of the forearm was a circle with a triangle within it, deep and red, as the branding iron had left it. ¹²⁹One or two of his neighbours pulled up their sleeves and showed their own lodge marks.

¹³⁰“We've all had it,” said one; “but not all as brave as you over it.”

¹³¹“Tut! ¹³²It was nothing,” said he; but it burned and ached all the same.

¹³³When the drinks which followed the ceremony of initiation had all been disposed of, the business of the lodge proceeded. ¹³⁴McMurdo, accustomed only to the prosaic performances of Chicago, listened with open ears and more surprise than he ventured to show to what followed.

¹³⁵"The first business on the agenda paper," said McGinty, "is to read the following letter from Division Master Windle of Merton County Lodge 249. ¹³⁶He says:

¹³⁷"Dear Sir:

¹³⁸"There is a job to be done on Andrew Rae of Rae & Sturmash, coal owners near this place. ¹³⁹You will remember that your lodge owes us a return, having had the service of two brethren in the matter of the patrolman last fall. ¹⁴⁰You will send two good men, they will be taken charge of by Treasurer Higgins of this lodge, whose address you know. ¹⁴¹He will show them when to act and where. ¹⁴²Yours in freedom,

¹⁴³"J. W. Windle D. M. A. O. F.

¹⁴⁴"Windle has never refused us when we have had occasion to ask for the loan of a man or two, and it is not for us to refuse him." ¹⁴⁵McGinty paused and looked round the room with his dull, malevolent eyes. ¹⁴⁶"Who will volunteer for the job?"

¹⁴⁷Several young fellows held up their hands. ¹⁴⁸The Bodymaster looked at them with an approving smile.

¹⁴⁹"You'll do, Tiger Cormac. ¹⁵⁰If you handle it as well as you did the last, you won't be wrong. ¹⁵¹And you, Wilson."

¹⁵²"I've no pistol," said the volunteer, a mere boy in his teens.

¹⁵³"It's your first, is it not? ¹⁵⁴Well, you have to be blooded some time. ¹⁵⁵It will be a great start for you. ¹⁵⁶As to the pistol, you'll find it waiting for you, or I'm mistaken. ¹⁵⁷If you report yourselves on Monday, it will be time enough. ¹⁵⁸You'll get a great welcome when you return."

¹⁵⁹"Any reward this time?" asked Cormac, a thick-set, dark-faced, brutal-looking young man, whose ferocity had earned him the nickname of "Tiger."

¹⁶⁰"Never mind the reward. ¹⁶¹You just do it for the honour of the thing. ¹⁶²Maybe when it is done there will be a few odd dollars at the bottom of the box."

¹⁶³"What has the man done?" asked young Wilson.

¹⁶⁴"Sure, it's not for the likes of you to ask what the man has done. ¹⁶⁵He has been judged over there. ¹⁶⁶That's no business of ours. ¹⁶⁷All we have to do is to carry it out for them, same as they would for us. ¹⁶⁸Speaking of that, two brothers from the Merton lodge are coming over to us next week to do some business in this quarter."

¹⁶⁹"Who are they?" asked someone.

¹⁷⁰"Faith, it is wiser not to ask. ¹⁷¹If you know nothing, you can testify nothing, and no trouble can come of it. ¹⁷²But they are men who will make a clean job when they are about it."

¹⁷³"And time, too!" cried Ted Baldwin. ¹⁷⁴"Folk are gettin' out of hand in these parts. ¹⁷⁵It was only last week that three of our men were turned off by Foreman Blaker. ¹⁷⁶It's been owing him a long time, and he'll get it full and proper."

¹⁷⁷"Get what?" McMurdo whispered to his neighbour.

¹⁷⁸“The business end of a buckshot cartridge!” cried the man with a loud laugh. ¹⁷⁹“What think you of our ways, Brother?”

¹⁸⁰McMurdo's criminal soul seemed to have already absorbed the spirit of the vile association of which he was now a member. ¹⁸¹“I like it well,” said he. ¹⁸²“Tis a proper place for a lad of mettle.”

¹⁸³Several of those who sat around heard his words and applauded them.

¹⁸⁴“What's that?” cried the black-maned Bodymaster from the end of the table.

¹⁸⁵“Tis our new brother, sir, who finds our ways to his taste.”

¹⁸⁶McMurdo rose to his feet for an instant. ¹⁸⁷“I would say, Eminent Bodymaster, that if a man should be wanted I should take it as an honour to be chosen to help the lodge.”

¹⁸⁸There was great applause at this. ¹⁸⁹It was felt that a new sun was pushing its rim above the horizon.

¹⁹⁰To some of the elders it seemed that the progress was a little too rapid.

¹⁹¹“I would move,” said the secretary, Harraway, a vulture-faced old graybeard who sat near the chairman, “that Brother McMurdo should wait until it is the good pleasure of the lodge to employ him.”

¹⁹²“Sure, that was what I meant; I'm in your hands,” said McMurdo.

¹⁹³“Your time will come, Brother,” said the chairman. ¹⁹⁴“We have marked you down as a willing man, and we believe that you will do good work in these parts. ¹⁹⁵There is a small matter to-night in which you may take a hand if it so please you.”

¹⁹⁶“I will wait for something that is worth while.”

¹⁹⁷“You can come to-night, anyhow, and it will help you to know what we stand for in this community.

¹⁹⁸I will make the announcement later. ¹⁹⁹Meanwhile,” he glanced at his agenda paper, “I have one or two more points to bring before the meeting. ²⁰⁰First of all, I will ask the treasurer as to our bank balance.

²⁰¹There is the pension to Jim Carnaway's widow. ²⁰²He was struck down doing the work of the lodge, and it is for us to see that she is not the loser.”

²⁰³“Jim was shot last month when they tried to kill Chester Wilcox of Marley Creek,” McMurdo's neighbour informed him.

²⁰⁴“The funds are good at the moment,” said the treasurer, with the bankbook in front of him. ²⁰⁵“The firms have been generous of late. ²⁰⁶Max Linder & Co. paid five hundred to be left alone. ²⁰⁷Walker Brothers sent in a hundred; but I took it on myself to return it and ask for five. ²⁰⁸If I do not hear by Wednesday, their winding gear may get out of order. ²⁰⁹We had to burn their breaker last year before they became reasonable. ²¹⁰Then the West Section Coaling Company has paid its annual contribution.

²¹¹We have enough on hand to meet any obligations.”

²¹²“What about Archie Swindon?” asked a brother.

²¹³“He has sold out and left the district. ²¹⁴The old devil left a note for us to say that he had rather be a free crossing sweeper in New York than a large mine owner under the power of a ring of blackmailers.

²¹⁵By Gar! it was as well that he made a break for it before the note reached us! ²¹⁶I guess he won't show his face in this valley again.”

²¹⁷An elderly, clean-shaved man with a kindly face and a good brow rose from the end of the table which faced the chairman. ²¹⁸“Mr. Treasurer,” he asked, “may I ask who has bought the property of this man that we have driven out of the district?”

²¹⁹“Yes, Brother Morris. ²²⁰It has been bought by the State & Merton County Railroad Company.”

²²¹“And who bought the mines of Todman and of Lee that came into the market in the same way last year?”

²²²“The same company, Brother Morris.”

²²³“And who bought the ironworks of Manson and of Shuman and of Van Deher and of Atwood, which have all been given up of late?”

²²⁴“They were all bought by the West Gilmerton General Mining Company.”

²²⁵“I don't see, Brother Morris,” said the chairman, “that it matters to us who buys them, since they can't carry them out of the district.”

²²⁶“With all respect to you, Eminent Bodymaster, I think it may matter very much to us. ²²⁷This process has been going on now for ten long years. ²²⁸We are gradually driving all the small men out of trade. ²²⁹What is the result? ²³⁰We find in their places great companies like the Railroad or the General Iron, who have their directors in New York or Philadelphia, and care nothing for our threats. ²³¹We can take it out of their local bosses, but it only means that others will be sent in their stead. ²³²And we are making it dangerous for ourselves. ²³³The small men could not harm us. ²³⁴They had not the money nor the power. ²³⁵So long as we did not squeeze them too dry, they would stay on under our power. ²³⁶But if these big companies find that we stand between them and their profits, they will spare no pains and no expense to hunt us down and bring us to court.”

²³⁷There was a hush at these ominous words, and every face darkened as gloomy looks were exchanged.

²³⁸So omnipotent and unchallenged had they been that the very thought that there was possible retribution in the background had been banished from their minds. ²³⁹And yet the idea struck a chill to the most reckless of them.

²⁴⁰“It is my advice,” the speaker continued, “that we go easier upon the small men. ²⁴¹On the day that they have all been driven out the power of this society will have been broken.”

²⁴²Unwelcome truths are not popular. ²⁴³There were angry cries as the speaker resumed his seat.

²⁴⁴McGinty rose with gloom upon his brow.

²⁴⁵“Brother Morris,” said he, “you were always a croaker. ²⁴⁶So long as the members of this lodge stand together there is no power in the United States that can touch them. ²⁴⁷Sure, have we not tried it often enough in the law courts? ²⁴⁸I expect the big companies will find it easier to pay than to fight, same as the little companies do. ²⁴⁹And now, Brethren,” McGinty took off his black velvet cap and his stole as he spoke, “this lodge has finished its business for the evening, save for one small matter which may be mentioned when we are parting. ²⁵⁰The time has now come for fraternal refreshment and for harmony.”

²⁵¹Strange indeed is human nature. ²⁵²Here were these men, to whom murder was familiar, who again and again had struck down the father of the family, some man against whom they had no personal feeling, without one thought of compunction or of compassion for his weeping wife or helpless children, and yet the tender or pathetic in music could move them to tears. ²⁵³McMurdo had a fine tenor voice, and if he had failed to gain the good will of the lodge before, it could no longer have been withheld after he had thrilled them with “I'm Sitting on the Stile, Mary,” and “On the Banks of Allan Water.”

²⁵⁴In his very first night the new recruit had made himself one of the most popular of the brethren, marked already for advancement and high office. ²⁵⁵There were other qualities needed, however, besides those of good fellowship, to make a worthy Freeman, and of these he was given an example before the evening was over. ²⁵⁶The whisky bottle had passed round many times, and the men were flushed and ripe for mischief when their Bodymaster rose once more to address them.

²⁵⁷“Boys,” said he, “there's one man in this town that wants trimming up, and it's for you to see that he gets it. ²⁵⁸I'm speaking of James Stanger of the Herald. ²⁵⁹You've seen how he's been opening his mouth against us again?”

²⁶⁰There was a murmur of assent, with many a muttered oath. ²⁶¹McGinty took a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket.

²⁶²Law and Order!

²⁶³That's how he heads it.

²⁶⁴“Reign of terror in the coal and iron district

²⁶⁵“Twelve years have now elapsed since the first assassinations which proved the existence of a criminal organization in our midst. ²⁶⁶From that day these outrages have never ceased, until now they have reached a pitch which makes us the opprobrium of the civilized world. ²⁶⁷Is it for such results as this that our great country welcomes to its bosom the alien who flies from the despotisms of Europe? ²⁶⁸Is it that they shall themselves become tyrants over the very men who have given them shelter, and that a state of terrorism and lawlessness should be established under the very shadow of the sacred folds of the starry Flag of Freedom which would raise horror in our minds if we read of it as existing under the most effete monarchy of the East? ²⁶⁹The men are known. ²⁷⁰The organization is patent and public. ²⁷¹How long are we to endure it? ²⁷²Can we forever live—

²⁷³Sure, I've read enough of the slush!“ cried the chairman, tossing the paper down upon the table.”

²⁷⁴That's what he says of us. ²⁷⁵The question I'm asking you is what shall we say to him?”

²⁷⁶“Kill him!” cried a dozen fierce voices.

²⁷⁷“I protest against that,” said Brother Morris, the man of the good brow and shaved face. ²⁷⁸“I tell you, Brethren, that our hand is too heavy in this valley, and that there will come a point where in self-defense every man will unite to crush us out. ²⁷⁹James Stanger is an old man. ²⁸⁰He is respected in the township and the district. ²⁸¹His paper stands for all that is solid in the valley. ²⁸²If that man is struck down, there will be a stir through this state that will only end with our destruction.”

²⁸³“And how would they bring about our destruction, Mr. Standback?” cried McGinty. ²⁸⁴“Is it by the police? ²⁸⁵Sure, half of them are in our pay and half of them afraid of us. ²⁸⁶Or is it by the law courts and the judge? ²⁸⁷Haven't we tried that before now, and what ever came of it?”

²⁸⁸“There is a Judge Lynch that might try the case,” said Brother Morris.

²⁸⁹A general shout of anger greeted the suggestion.

²⁹⁰“I have but to raise my finger,” cried McGinty, “and I could put two hundred men into this town that would clear it out from end to end.” ²⁹¹Then suddenly raising his voice and bending his huge black brows into a terrible frown, “See here, Brother Morris, I have my eye on you, and have had for some time! ²⁹²You've no heart yourself, and you try to take the heart out of others. ²⁹³It will be an ill day for you, Brother Morris, when your own name comes on our agenda paper, and I'm thinking that it's just there that I ought to place it.”

²⁹⁴Morris had turned deadly pale, and his knees seemed to give way under him as he fell back into his chair. ²⁹⁵He raised his glass in his trembling hand and drank before he could answer. ²⁹⁶“I apologize, Eminent Bodymaster, to you and to every brother in this lodge if I have said more than I should. ²⁹⁷I am a faithful member—you all know that—and it is my fear lest evil come to the lodge which makes me speak in anxious words. ²⁹⁸But I have greater trust in your judgment than in my own, Eminent Bodymaster, and I promise you that I will not offend again.”

²⁹⁹The Bodymaster's scowl relaxed as he listened to the humble words. ³⁰⁰"Very good, Brother Morris. ³⁰¹It's myself that would be sorry if it were needful to give you a lesson. ³⁰²But so long as I am in this chair we shall be a united lodge in word and in deed. ³⁰³And now, boys," he continued, looking round at the company, "I'll say this much, that if Stanger got his full deserts there would be more trouble than we need ask for. ³⁰⁴These editors hang together, and every journal in the state would be crying out for police and troops. ³⁰⁵But I guess you can give him a pretty severe warning. ³⁰⁶Will you fix it, Brother Baldwin?"

³⁰⁷"Sure!" said the young man eagerly.

³⁰⁸"How many will you take?"

³⁰⁹"Half a dozen, and two to guard the door. ³¹⁰You'll come, Gower, and you, Mansel, and you, Scanlan, and the two Willabys."

³¹¹"I promised the new brother he should go," said the chairman.

³¹²Ted Baldwin looked at McMurdo with eyes which showed that he had not forgotten nor forgiven. ³¹³"Well, he can come if he wants," he said in a surly voice. ³¹⁴"That's enough. ³¹⁵The sooner we get to work the better."

³¹⁶The company broke up with shouts and yells and snatches of drunken song. ³¹⁷The bar was still crowded with revellers, and many of the brethren remained there. ³¹⁸The little band who had been told off for duty passed out into the street, proceeding in twos and threes along the sidewalk so as not to provoke attention. ³¹⁹It was a bitterly cold night, with a half-moon shining brilliantly in a frosty, star-spangled sky. ³²⁰The men stopped and gathered in a yard which faced a high building. ³²¹The words "Vermissa Herald" were printed in gold lettering between the brightly lit windows. ³²²From within came the clanking of the printing press.

³²³"Here, you," said Baldwin to McMurdo, "you can stand below at the door and see that the road is kept open for us. ³²⁴Arthur Willaby can stay with you. ³²⁵You others come with me. ³²⁶Have no fears, boys; for we have a dozen witnesses that we are in the Union Bar at this very moment."

³²⁷It was nearly midnight, and the street was deserted save for one or two revellers upon their way home. ³²⁸The party crossed the road, and, pushing open the door of the newspaper office, Baldwin and his men rushed in and up the stair which faced them. ³²⁹McMurdo and another remained below. ³³⁰From the room above came a shout, a cry for help, and then the sound of trampling feet and of falling chairs. ³³¹An instant later a gray-haired man rushed out on the landing.

³³²He was seized before he could get farther, and his spectacles came tinkling down to McMurdo's feet. ³³³There was a thud and a groan. ³³⁴He was on his face, and half a dozen sticks were clattering together as they fell upon him. ³³⁵He writhed, and his long, thin limbs quivered under the blows. ³³⁶The others ceased at last; but Baldwin, his cruel face set in an infernal smile, was hacking at the man's head, which he vainly endeavoured to defend with his arms. ³³⁷His white hair was dabbled with patches of blood. ³³⁸Baldwin was still stooping over his victim, putting in a short, vicious blow whenever he could see a part exposed, when McMurdo dashed up the stair and pushed him back.

³³⁹"You'll kill the man," said he. ³⁴⁰"Drop it!"

³⁴¹Baldwin looked at him in amazement. ³⁴²"Curse you!" he cried. ³⁴³"Who are you to interfere—you that are new to the lodge? ³⁴⁴Stand back!" ³⁴⁵He raised his stick; but McMurdo had whipped his pistol out of his hip pocket.

³⁴⁶"Stand back yourself!" he cried. ³⁴⁷"I'll blow your face in if you lay a hand on me. ³⁴⁸As to the lodge, wasn't it the order of the Bodymaster that the man was not to be killed—and what are you doing but killing him?"

³⁴⁹“It's truth he says,” remarked one of the men.

³⁵⁰“By Gar! you'd best hurry yourselves!” cried the man below. ³⁵¹“The windows are all lighting up, and you'll have the whole town here inside of five minutes.”

³⁵²There was indeed the sound of shouting in the street, and a little group of compositors and pressmen was forming in the hall below and nerving itself to action. ³⁵³Leaving the limp and motionless body of the editor at the head of the stair, the criminals rushed down and made their way swiftly along the street.

³⁵⁴Having reached the Union House, some of them mixed with the crowd in McGinty's saloon, whispering across the bar to the Boss that the job had been well carried through. ³⁵⁵Others, and among them McMurdo, broke away into side streets, and so by devious paths to their own homes.

Chapter XI.

The Valley of Fear

¹When McMurdo awoke next morning he had good reason to remember his initiation into the lodge. ²His head ached with the effect of the drink, and his arm, where he had been branded, was hot and swollen. ³Having his own peculiar source of income, he was irregular in his attendance at his work; so he had a late breakfast, and remained at home for the morning writing a long letter to a friend. ⁴Afterwards he read the Daily Herald. ⁵In a special column put in at the last moment he read:

⁶Outrage at the herald office — Editor seriously injured

⁷It was a short account of the facts with which he was himself more familiar than the writer could have been. ⁸It ended with the statement:

⁹The matter is now in the hands of the police; but it can hardly be hoped that their exertions will be attended by any better results than in the past. ¹⁰Some of the men were recognized, and there is hope that a conviction may be obtained. ¹¹The source of the outrage was, it need hardly be said, that infamous society which has held this community in bondage for so long a period, and against which the Herald has taken so uncompromising a stand. ¹²Mr. Stanger's many friends will rejoice to hear that, though he has been cruelly and brutally beaten, and though he has sustained severe injuries about the head, there is no immediate danger to his life.

¹³Below it stated that a guard of police, armed with Winchester rifles, had been requisitioned for the defense of the office.

¹⁴McMurdo had laid down the paper, and was lighting his pipe with a hand which was shaky from the excesses of the previous evening, when there was a knock outside, and his landlady brought to him a note which had just been handed in by a lad. ¹⁵It was unsigned, and ran thus:

¹⁶I should wish to speak to you, but would rather not do so in your house. ¹⁷You will find me beside the flagstaff upon Miller Hill. ¹⁸If you will come there now, I have something which it is important for you to hear and for me to say.

¹⁹McMurdo read the note twice with the utmost surprise; for he could not imagine what it meant or who was the author of it. ²⁰Had it been in a feminine hand, he might have imagined that it was the beginning of one of those adventures which had been familiar enough in his past life. ²¹But it was the writing of a man, and of a well educated one, too. ²²Finally, after some hesitation, he determined to see the matter through.

²³Miller Hill is an ill-kept public park in the very centre of the town. ²⁴In summer it is a favourite resort of the people; but in winter it is desolate enough. ²⁵From the top of it one has a view not only of the whole straggling, grimy town, but of the winding valley beneath, with its scattered mines and factories blackening the snow on each side of it, and of the wooded and white-capped ranges flanking it.

²⁶McMurdo strolled up the winding path hedged in with evergreens until he reached the deserted restaurant which forms the centre of summer gaiety. ²⁷Beside it was a bare flagstaff, and underneath it a man, his hat drawn down and the collar of his overcoat turned up. ²⁸When he turned his face McMurdo saw that it was Brother Morris, he who had incurred the anger of the Bodymaster the night before. ²⁹The lodge sign was given and exchanged as they met.

³⁰"I wanted to have a word with you, Mr. McMurdo," said the older man, speaking with a hesitation which showed that he was on delicate ground. ³¹"It was kind of you to come."

³²“Why did you not put your name to the note?”

³³“One has to be cautious, mister. ³⁴One never knows in times like these how a thing may come back to one. ³⁵One never knows either who to trust or who not to trust.”

³⁶“Surely one may trust brothers of the lodge.”

³⁷“No, no, not always,” cried Morris with vehemence. ³⁸“Whatever we say, even what we think, seems to go back to that man McGinty.”

³⁹“Look here!” said McMurdo sternly. ⁴⁰“It was only last night, as you know well, that I swore good faith to our Bodymaster. ⁴¹Would you be asking me to break my oath?”

⁴²“If that is the view you take,” said Morris sadly, “I can only say that I am sorry I gave you the trouble to come and meet me. ⁴³Things have come to a bad pass when two free citizens cannot speak their thoughts to each other.”

⁴⁴McMurdo, who had been watching his companion very narrowly, relaxed somewhat in his bearing. ⁴⁵“Sure I spoke for myself only,” said he. ⁴⁶“I am a newcomer, as you know, and I am strange to it all. ⁴⁷It is not for me to open my mouth, Mr. Morris, and if you think well to say anything to me I am here to hear it.”

⁴⁸“And to take it back to Boss McGinty!” said Morris bitterly.

⁴⁹“Indeed, then, you do me injustice there,” cried McMurdo. ⁵⁰“For myself I am loyal to the lodge, and so I tell you straight; but I would be a poor creature if I were to repeat to any other what you might say to me in confidence. ⁵¹It will go no further than me; though I warn you that you may get neither help nor sympathy.”

⁵²“I have given up looking for either the one or the other,” said Morris. ⁵³“I may be putting my very life in your hands by what I say; but, bad as you are—and it seemed to me last night that you were shaping to be as bad as the worst—still you are new to it, and your conscience cannot yet be as hardened as theirs. ⁵⁴That was why I thought to speak with you.”

⁵⁵“Well, what have you to say?”

⁵⁶“If you give me away, may a curse be on you!”

⁵⁷“Sure, I said I would not.”

⁵⁸“I would ask you, then, when you joined the Freeman's society in Chicago and swore vows of charity and fidelity, did ever it cross your mind that you might find it would lead you to crime?”

⁵⁹“If you call it crime,” McMurdo answered.

⁶⁰“Call it crime!” cried Morris, his voice vibrating with passion. ⁶¹“You have seen little of it if you can call it anything else. ⁶²Was it crime last night when a man old enough to be your father was beaten till the blood dripped from his white hairs? ⁶³Was that crime—or what else would you call it?”

⁶⁴“There are some would say it was war,” said McMurdo, “a war of two classes with all in, so that each struck as best it could.”

⁶⁵“Well, did you think of such a thing when you joined the Freeman's society at Chicago?”

⁶⁶“No, I'm bound to say I did not.”

⁶⁷“Nor did I when I joined it at Philadelphia. ⁶⁸It was just a benefit club and a meeting place for one's fellows. ⁶⁹Then I heard of this place—curse the hour that the name first fell upon my ears!—and I came to better myself! ⁷⁰My God! to better myself! ⁷¹My wife and three children came with me. ⁷²I started a

dry goods store on Market Square, and I prospered well. ⁷³The word had gone round that I was a Freeman, and I was forced to join the local lodge, same as you did last night. ⁷⁴I've the badge of shame on my forearm and something worse branded on my heart. ⁷⁵I found that I was under the orders of a black villain and caught in a meshwork of crime. ⁷⁶What could I do? ⁷⁷Every word I said to make things better was taken as treason, same as it was last night. ⁷⁸I can't get away; for all I have in the world is in my store. ⁷⁹If I leave the society, I know well that it means murder to me, and God knows what to my wife and children. ⁸⁰Oh, man, it is awful—awful!" ⁸¹He put his hands to his face, and his body shook with convulsive sobs.

⁸²McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. ⁸³"You were too soft for the job," said he. ⁸⁴"You are the wrong sort for such work."

⁸⁵"I had a conscience and a religion; but they made me a criminal among them. ⁸⁶I was chosen for a job. ⁸⁷If I backed down I knew well what would come to me. ⁸⁸Maybe I'm a coward. ⁸⁹Maybe it's the thought of my poor little woman and the children that makes me one. ⁹⁰Anyhow I went. ⁹¹I guess it will haunt me forever.

⁹²"It was a lonely house, twenty miles from here, over the range yonder. ⁹³I was told off for the door, same as you were last night. ⁹⁴They could not trust me with the job. ⁹⁵The others went in. ⁹⁶When they came out their hands were crimson to the wrists. ⁹⁷As we turned away a child was screaming out of the house behind us. ⁹⁸It was a boy of five who had seen his father murdered. ⁹⁹I nearly fainted with the horror of it, and yet I had to keep a bold and smiling face; for well I knew that if I did not it would be out of my house that they would come next with their bloody hands and it would be my little Fred that would be screaming for his father.

¹⁰⁰"But I was a criminal then, part sharer in a murder, lost forever in this world, and lost also in the next. ¹⁰¹I am a good Catholic; but the priest would have no word with me when he heard I was a Scowrer, and I am excommunicated from my faith. ¹⁰²That's how it stands with me. ¹⁰³And I see you going down the same road, and I ask you what the end is to be. ¹⁰⁴Are you ready to be a cold-blooded murderer also, or can we do anything to stop it?"

¹⁰⁵"What would you do?" asked McMurdo abruptly. ¹⁰⁶"You would not inform?"

¹⁰⁷"God forbid!" cried Morris. ¹⁰⁸"Sure, the very thought would cost me my life."

¹⁰⁹"That's well," said McMurdo. ¹¹⁰"I'm thinking that you are a weak man and that you make too much of the matter."

¹¹¹"Too much! ¹¹²Wait till you have lived here longer. ¹¹³Look down the valley! ¹¹⁴See the cloud of a hundred chimneys that overshadows it! ¹¹⁵I tell you that the cloud of murder hangs thicker and lower than that over the heads of the people. ¹¹⁶It is the Valley of Fear, the Valley of Death. ¹¹⁷The terror is in the hearts of the people from the dusk to the dawn. ¹¹⁸Wait, young man, and you will learn for yourself."

¹¹⁹"Well, I'll let you know what I think when I have seen more," said McMurdo carelessly. ¹²⁰"What is very clear is that you are not the man for the place, and that the sooner you sell out—if you only get a dime a dollar for what the business is worth—the better it will be for you. ¹²¹What you have said is safe with me; but, by Gar! if I thought you were an informer—"

¹²²"No, no!" cried Morris piteously.

¹²³"Well, let it rest at that. ¹²⁴I'll bear what you have said in mind, and maybe some day I'll come back to it. ¹²⁵I expect you meant kindly by speaking to me like this. ¹²⁶Now I'll be getting home."

¹²⁷"One word before you go," said Morris. ¹²⁸"We may have been seen together. ¹²⁹They may want to know what we have spoken about."

¹³⁰“Ah! that's well thought of.”

¹³¹“I offer you a clerkship in my store.”

¹³²“And I refuse it. ¹³³That's our business. ¹³⁴Well, so long, Brother Morris, and may you find things go better with you in the future.”

¹³⁵That same afternoon, as McMurdo sat smoking, lost in thought beside the stove of his sitting-room, the door swung open and its framework was filled with the huge figure of Boss McGinty. ¹³⁶He passed the sign, and then seating himself opposite to the young man he looked at him steadily for some time, a look which was as steadily returned.

¹³⁷“I'm not much of a visitor, Brother McMurdo,” he said at last. ¹³⁸“I guess I am too busy over the folk that visit me. ¹³⁹But I thought I'd stretch a point and drop down to see you in your own house.”

¹⁴⁰“I'm proud to see you here, Councillor,” McMurdo answered heartily, bringing his whisky bottle out of the cupboard. ¹⁴¹“It's an honour that I had not expected.”

¹⁴²“How's the arm?” asked the Boss.

¹⁴³McMurdo made a wry face. ¹⁴⁴“Well, I'm not forgetting it,” he said; “but it's worth it.”

¹⁴⁵“Yes, it's worth it,” the other answered, “to those that are loyal and go through with it and are a help to the lodge. ¹⁴⁶What were you speaking to Brother Morris about on Miller Hill this morning?”

¹⁴⁷The question came so suddenly that it was well that he had his answer prepared. ¹⁴⁸He burst into a hearty laugh. ¹⁴⁹“Morris didn't know I could earn a living here at home. ¹⁵⁰He shan't know either; for he has got too much conscience for the likes of me. ¹⁵¹But he's a good-hearted old chap. ¹⁵²It was his idea that I was at a loose end, and that he would do me a good turn by offering me a clerkship in a dry goods store.”

¹⁵³“Oh, that was it?”

¹⁵⁴“Yes, that was it.”

¹⁵⁵“And you refused it?”

¹⁵⁶“Sure. ¹⁵⁷Couldn't I earn ten times as much in my own bedroom with four hours' work?”

¹⁵⁸“That's so. ¹⁵⁹But I wouldn't get about too much with Morris.”

¹⁶⁰“Why not?”

¹⁶¹“Well, I guess because I tell you not. ¹⁶²That's enough for most folk in these parts.”

¹⁶³“It may be enough for most folk; but it ain't enough for me, Councillor,” said McMurdo boldly. ¹⁶⁴“If you are a judge of men, you'll know that.”

¹⁶⁵The swarthy giant glared at him, and his hairy paw closed for an instant round the glass as though he would hurl it at the head of his companion. ¹⁶⁶Then he laughed in his loud, boisterous, insincere fashion.

¹⁶⁷“You're a queer card, for sure,” said he. ¹⁶⁸“Well, if you want reasons, I'll give them. ¹⁶⁹Did Morris say nothing to you against the lodge?”

¹⁷⁰“No.”

¹⁷¹“Nor against me?”

¹⁷²“No.”

¹⁷³“Well, that's because he daren't trust you. ¹⁷⁴But in his heart he is not a loyal brother. ¹⁷⁵We know that well. ¹⁷⁶So we watch him and we wait for the time to admonish him. ¹⁷⁷I'm thinking that the time is drawing near. ¹⁷⁸There's no room for scabby sheep in our pen. ¹⁷⁹But if you keep company with a disloyal man, we might think that you were disloyal, too. ¹⁸⁰See?”

¹⁸¹“There's no chance of my keeping company with him; for I dislike the man,” McMurdo answered.

¹⁸²“As to being disloyal, if it was any man but you he would not use the word to me twice.”

¹⁸³“Well, that's enough,” said McGinty, draining off his glass. ¹⁸⁴“I came down to give you a word in season, and you've had it.”

¹⁸⁵“I'd like to know,” said McMurdo, “how you ever came to learn that I had spoken with Morris at all?”

¹⁸⁶McGinty laughed. ¹⁸⁷“It's my business to know what goes on in this township,” said he. ¹⁸⁸“I guess you'd best reckon on my hearing all that passes. ¹⁸⁹Well, time's up, and I'll just say—”

¹⁹⁰But his leavetaking was cut short in a very unexpected fashion. ¹⁹¹With a sudden crash the door flew open, and three frowning, intent faces glared in at them from under the peaks of police caps. ¹⁹²McMurdo sprang to his feet and half drew his revolver; but his arm stopped midway as he became conscious that two Winchester rifles were levelled at his head. ¹⁹³A man in uniform advanced into the room, a six-shooter in his hand. ¹⁹⁴It was Captain Marvin, once of Chicago, and now of the Mine Constabulary. ¹⁹⁵He shook his head with a half-smile at McMurdo.

¹⁹⁶“I thought you'd be getting into trouble, Mr. Crooked McMurdo of Chicago,” said he. ¹⁹⁷“Can't keep out of it, can you? ¹⁹⁸Take your hat and come along with us.”

¹⁹⁹“I guess you'll pay for this, Captain Marvin,” said McGinty. ²⁰⁰“Who are you, I'd like to know, to break into a house in this fashion and molest honest, law-abiding men?”

²⁰¹“You're standing out in this deal, Councillor McGinty,” said the police captain. ²⁰²“We are not out after you, but after this man McMurdo. ²⁰³It is for you to help, not to hinder us in our duty,”

²⁰⁴“He is a friend of mine, and I'll answer for his conduct,” said the Boss.

²⁰⁵“By all accounts, Mr. McGinty, you may have to answer for your own conduct some of these days,” the captain answered. ²⁰⁶“This man McMurdo was a crook before ever he came here, and he's a crook still. ²⁰⁷Cover him, Patrolman, while I disarm him.”

²⁰⁸“There's my pistol,” said McMurdo coolly. ²⁰⁹“Maybe, Captain Marvin, if you and I were alone and face to face you would not take me so easily.”

²¹⁰“Where's your warrant?” asked McGinty. ²¹¹“By Gar! a man might as well live in Russia as in Vermissa while folk like you are running the police. ²¹²It's a capitalist outrage, and you'll hear more of it, I reckon.”

²¹³“You do what you think is your duty the best way you can, Councillor. ²¹⁴We'll look after ours.”

²¹⁵“What am I accused of?” asked McMurdo.

²¹⁶“Of being concerned in the beating of old Editor Stanger at the Herald office. ²¹⁷It wasn't your fault that it isn't a murder charge.”

²¹⁸“Well, if that's all you have against him,” cried McGinty with a laugh, “you can save yourself a deal of trouble by dropping it right now. ²¹⁹This man was with me in my saloon playing poker up to midnight, and I can bring a dozen to prove it.”

²²⁰“That's your affair, and I guess you can settle it in court to-morrow. ²²¹Meanwhile, come on, McMurdo, and come quietly if you don't want a gun across your head. ²²²You stand wide, Mr. McGinty; for I warn you I will stand no resistance when I am on duty!”

²²³So determined was the appearance of the captain that both McMurdo and his boss were forced to accept the situation. ²²⁴The latter managed to have a few whispered words with the prisoner before they parted.

²²⁵“What about—” he jerked his thumb upward to signify the coining plant.

²²⁶“All right,” whispered McMurdo, who had devised a safe hiding place under the floor.

²²⁷“I'll bid you good-bye,” said the Boss, shaking hands. ²²⁸“I'll see Reilly the lawyer and take the defense upon myself. ²²⁹Take my word for it that they won't be able to hold you.”

²³⁰“I wouldn't bet on that. ²³¹Guard the prisoner, you two, and shoot him if he tries any games. ²³²I'll search the house before I leave.”

²³³He did so; but apparently found no trace of the concealed plant. ²³⁴When he had descended he and his men escorted McMurdo to headquarters. ²³⁵Darkness had fallen, and a keen blizzard was blowing so that the streets were nearly deserted; but a few loiterers followed the group, and emboldened by invisibility shouted imprecations at the prisoner.

²³⁶“Lynch the cursed Scowrer!” they cried. ²³⁷“Lynch him!” ²³⁸They laughed and jeered as he was pushed into the police station. ²³⁹After a short, formal examination from the inspector in charge he was put into the common cell. ²⁴⁰Here he found Baldwin and three other criminals of the night before, all arrested that afternoon and waiting their trial next morning.

²⁴¹But even within this inner fortress of the law the long arm of the Freeman was able to extend. ²⁴²Late at night there came a jailer with a straw bundle for their bedding, out of which he extracted two bottles of whisky, some glasses, and a pack of cards. ²⁴³They spent a hilarious night, without an anxious thought as to the ordeal of the morning.

²⁴⁴Nor had they cause, as the result was to show. ²⁴⁵The magistrate could not possibly, on the evidence, have held them for a higher court. ²⁴⁶On the one hand the compositors and pressmen were forced to admit that the light was uncertain, that they were themselves much perturbed, and that it was difficult for them to swear to the identity of the assailants; although they believed that the accused were among them. ²⁴⁷Cross examined by the clever attorney who had been engaged by McGinty, they were even more nebulous in their evidence.

²⁴⁸The injured man had already deposed that he was so taken by surprise by the suddenness of the attack that he could state nothing beyond the fact that the first man who struck him wore a moustache. ²⁴⁹He added that he knew them to be Scowrers, since no one else in the community could possibly have any enmity to him, and he had long been threatened on account of his outspoken editorials. ²⁵⁰On the other hand, it was clearly shown by the united and unfaltering evidence of six citizens, including that high municipal official, Councillor McGinty, that the men had been at a card party at the Union House until an hour very much later than the commission of the outrage.

²⁵¹Needless to say that they were discharged with something very near to an apology from the bench for the inconvenience to which they had been put, together with an implied censure of Captain Marvin and the police for their officious zeal.

²⁵²The verdict was greeted with loud applause by a court in which McMurdo saw many familiar faces. ²⁵³Brothers of the lodge smiled and waved. ²⁵⁴But there were others who sat with compressed lips and brooding eyes as the men filed out of the dock. ²⁵⁵One of them, a little, dark-bearded, resolute fellow, put the thoughts of himself and comrades into words as the ex-prisoners passed him.

²⁵⁶“You damned murderers!” he said. ²⁵⁷“We’ll fix you yet!”

Chapter XII.

The Darkest Hour

¹If anything had been needed to give an impetus to Jack McMurdo's popularity among his fellows it would have been his arrest and acquittal. ²That a man on the very night of joining the lodge should have done something which brought him before the magistrate was a new record in the annals of the society. ³Already he had earned the reputation of a good boon companion, a cheery reveller, and withal a man of high temper, who would not take an insult even from the all-powerful Boss himself. ⁴But in addition to this he impressed his comrades with the idea that among them all there was not one whose brain was so ready to devise a bloodthirsty scheme, or whose hand would be more capable of carrying it out. ⁵"He'll be the boy for the clean job," said the oldsters to one another, and waited their time until they could set him to his work.

⁶McGinty had instruments enough already; but he recognized that this was a supremely able one. ⁷He felt like a man holding a fierce bloodhound in leash. ⁸There were curs to do the smaller work; but some day he would slip this creature upon its prey. ⁹A few members of the lodge, Ted Baldwin among them, resented the rapid rise of the stranger and hated him for it; but they kept clear of him, for he was as ready to fight as to laugh.

¹⁰But if he gained favour with his fellows, there was another quarter, one which had become even more vital to him, in which he lost it. ¹¹Ettie Shafter's father would have nothing more to do with him, nor would he allow him to enter the house. ¹²Ettie herself was too deeply in love to give him up altogether, and yet her own good sense warned her of what would come from a marriage with a man who was regarded as a criminal.

¹³One morning after a sleepless night she determined to see him, possibly for the last time, and make one strong endeavour to draw him from those evil influences which were sucking him down. ¹⁴She went to his house, as he had often begged her to do, and made her way into the room which he used as his sitting-room. ¹⁵He was seated at a table, with his back turned and a letter in front of him. ¹⁶A sudden spirit of girlish mischief came over her—she was still only nineteen. ¹⁷He had not heard her when she pushed open the door. ¹⁸Now she tiptoed forward and laid her hand lightly upon his bended shoulders.

¹⁹If she had expected to startle him, she certainly succeeded; but only in turn to be startled herself. ²⁰With a tiger spring he turned on her, and his right hand was feeling for her throat. ²¹At the same instant with the other hand he crumpled up the paper that lay before him. ²²For an instant he stood glaring. ²³Then astonishment and joy took the place of the ferocity which had convulsed his features—a ferocity which had sent her shrinking back in horror as from something which had never before intruded into her gentle life.

²⁴"It's you!" said he, mopping his brow. ²⁵"And to think that you should come to me, heart of my heart, and I should find nothing better to do than to want to strangle you! ²⁶Come then, darling," and he held out his arms, "let me make it up to you."

²⁷But she had not recovered from that sudden glimpse of guilty fear which she had read in the man's face. ²⁸All her woman's instinct told her that it was not the mere fright of a man who is startled. ²⁹Guilt—that was it—guilt and fear!

³⁰"What's come over you, Jack?" she cried. ³¹"Why were you so scared of me? ³²Oh, Jack, if your conscience was at ease, you would not have looked at me like that!"

³³“Sure, I was thinking of other things, and when you came tripping so lightly on those fairy feet of yours—”

³⁴“No, no, it was more than that, Jack.” ³⁵Then a sudden suspicion seized her. ³⁶“Let me see that letter you were writing.”

³⁷“Ah, Ettie, I couldn't do that.”

³⁸Her suspicions became certainties. ³⁹“It's to another woman,” she cried. ⁴⁰“I know it! ⁴¹Why else should you hold it from me? ⁴²Was it to your wife that you were writing? ⁴³How am I to know that you are not a married man—you, a stranger, that nobody knows?”

⁴⁴“I am not married, Ettie. ⁴⁵See now, I swear it! ⁴⁶You're the only one woman on earth to me. ⁴⁷By the cross of Christ I swear it!”

⁴⁸He was so white with passionate earnestness that she could not but believe him.

⁴⁹“Well, then,” she cried, “why will you not show me the letter?”

⁵⁰“I'll tell you, acushla,” said he. ⁵¹“I'm under oath not to show it, and just as I wouldn't break my word to you so I would keep it to those who hold my promise. ⁵²It's the business of the lodge, and even to you it's secret. ⁵³And if I was scared when a hand fell on me, can't you understand it when it might have been the hand of a detective?”

⁵⁴She felt that he was telling the truth. ⁵⁵He gathered her into his arms and kissed away her fears and doubts.

⁵⁶“Sit here by me, then. It's a queer throne for such a queen; but it's the best your poor lover can find. ⁵⁷He'll do better for you some of these days, I'm thinking. ⁵⁸Now your mind is easy once again, is it not?”

⁵⁹“How can it ever be at ease, Jack, when I know that you are a criminal among criminals, when I never know the day that I may hear you are in court for murder? ⁶⁰‘McMurdo the Scowrer,’ that's what one of our boarders called you yesterday. ⁶¹It went through my heart like a knife.”

⁶²“Sure, hard words break no bones.”

⁶³“But they were true.”

⁶⁴“Well, dear, it's not so bad as you think. ⁶⁵We are but poor men that are trying in our own way to get our rights.”

⁶⁶Ettie threw her arms round her lover's neck. ⁶⁷“Give it up, Jack! ⁶⁸For my sake, for God's sake, give it up! ⁶⁹It was to ask you that I came here to-day. ⁷⁰Oh, Jack, see—I beg it of you on my bended knees! ⁷¹Kneeling here before you I implore you to give it up!”

⁷²He raised her and soothed her with her head against his breast.

⁷³“Sure, my darlin', you don't know what it is you are asking. ⁷⁴How could I give it up when it would be to break my oath and to desert my comrades? ⁷⁵If you could see how things stand with me you could never ask it of me. ⁷⁶Besides, if I wanted to, how could I do it? ⁷⁷You don't suppose that the lodge would let a man go free with all its secrets?”

⁷⁸“I've thought of that, Jack. ⁷⁹I've planned it all. ⁸⁰Father has saved some money. ⁸¹He is weary of this place where the fear of these people darkens our lives. ⁸²He is ready to go. ⁸³We would fly together to Philadelphia or New York, where we would be safe from them.”

⁸⁴McMurdo laughed. ⁸⁵“The lodge has a long arm. ⁸⁶Do you think it could not stretch from here to Philadelphia or New York?”

⁸⁷“Well, then, to the West, or to England, or to Germany, where father came from—anywhere to get away from this Valley of Fear!”

⁸⁸McMurdo thought of old Brother Morris. ⁸⁹“Sure, it is the second time I have heard the valley so named,” said he. ⁹⁰“The shadow does indeed seem to lie heavy on some of you.”

⁹¹“It darkens every moment of our lives. ⁹²Do you suppose that Ted Baldwin has ever forgiven us? ⁹³If it were not that he fears you, what do you suppose our chances would be? ⁹⁴If you saw the look in those dark, hungry eyes of his when they fall on me!”

⁹⁵“By Gar! ⁹⁶I'd teach him better manners if I caught him at it! ⁹⁷But see here, little girl. ⁹⁸I can't leave here. ¹⁰⁰I can't—take that from me once and for all. ¹⁰¹But if you will leave me to find my own way, I will try to prepare a way of getting honourably out of it.”

¹⁰²“There is no honour in such a matter.”

¹⁰³“Well, well, it's just how you look at it. ¹⁰⁴But if you'll give me six months, I'll work it so that I can leave without being ashamed to look others in the face.”

¹⁰⁴The girl laughed with joy. ¹⁰⁵“Six months!” she cried. ¹⁰⁶“Is it a promise?”

¹⁰⁷“Well, it may be seven or eight. ¹⁰⁸But within a year at the furthest we will leave the valley behind us.”

¹⁰⁹It was the most that Ettie could obtain, and yet it was something. ¹¹⁰There was this distant light to illuminate the gloom of the immediate future. ¹¹¹She returned to her father's house more light-hearted than she had ever been since Jack McMurdo had come into her life.

¹¹²It might be thought that as a member, all the doings of the society would be told to him; but he was soon to discover that the organization was wider and more complex than the simple lodge. ¹¹³Even Boss McGinty was ignorant as to many things; for there was an official named the County Delegate, living at Hobson's Patch farther down the line, who had power over several different lodges which he wielded in a sudden and arbitrary way. ¹¹⁴Only once did McMurdo see him, a sly, little gray-haired rat of a man, with a slinking gait and a sidelong glance which was charged with malice. ¹¹⁵Evans Pott was his name, and even the great Boss of Vermissa felt towards him something of the repulsion and fear which the huge Danton may have felt for the puny but dangerous Robespierre.

¹¹⁶One day Scanlan, who was McMurdo's fellow boarder, received a note from McGinty inclosing one from Evans Pott, which informed him that he was sending over two good men, Lawler and Andrews, who had instructions to act in the neighbourhood; though it was best for the cause that no particulars as to their objects should be given. ¹¹⁷Would the Bodymaster see to it that suitable arrangements be made for their lodgings and comfort until the time for action should arrive? ¹¹⁸McGinty added that it was impossible for anyone to remain secret at the Union House, and that, therefore, he would be obliged if McMurdo and Scanlan would put the strangers up for a few days in their boarding house.

¹¹⁹The same evening the two men arrived, each carrying his gripsack. Lawler was an elderly man, shrewd, silent, and self-contained, clad in an old black frock coat, which with his soft felt hat and ragged, grizzled beard gave him a general resemblance to an itinerant preacher. ¹²⁰His companion Andrews was little more than a boy, frank-faced and cheerful, with the breezy manner of one who is out for a holiday and means to enjoy every minute of it. ¹²¹Both men were total abstainers, and behaved in all ways as exemplary members of the society, with the one simple exception that they were assassins who had often proved themselves to be most capable instruments for this association of murder. ¹²²Lawler had already carried out fourteen commissions of the kind, and Andrews three.

¹²³They were, as McMurdo found, quite ready to converse about their deeds in the past, which they recounted with the half-bashful pride of men who had done good and unselfish service for the community. ¹²⁴They were reticent, however, as to the immediate job in hand.

¹²⁵“They chose us because neither I nor the boy here drink,” Lawler explained. ¹²⁶“They can count on us saying no more than we should. ¹²⁷You must not take it amiss, but it is the orders of the County Delegate that we obey.”

¹²⁸“Sure, we are all in it together,” said Scanlan, McMurdo's mate, as the four sat together at supper.

¹²⁹“That's true enough, and we'll talk till the cows come home of the killing of Charlie Williams or of Simon Bird, or any other job in the past. ¹³⁰But till the work is done we say nothing.”

¹³¹“There are half a dozen about here that I have a word to say to,” said McMurdo, with an oath. ¹³²“I suppose it isn't Jack Knox of Ironhill that you are after. ¹³³I'd go some way to see him get his deserts.”

¹³⁴“No, it's not him yet.”

¹³⁵“Or Herman Strauss?”

¹³⁶“No, nor him either.”

¹³⁷“Well, if you won't tell us we can't make you; but I'd be glad to know.”

¹³⁸Lawler smiled and shook his head. ¹³⁹He was not to be drawn.

¹⁴⁰In spite of the reticence of their guests, Scanlan and McMurdo were quite determined to be present at what they called “the fun.” ¹⁴¹When, therefore, at an early hour one morning McMurdo heard them creeping down the stairs he awakened Scanlan, and the two hurried on their clothes. ¹⁴²When they were dressed they found that the others had stolen out, leaving the door open behind them. ¹⁴³It was not yet dawn, and by the light of the lamps they could see the two men some distance down the street. ¹⁴⁴They followed them warily, treading noiselessly in the deep snow.

¹⁴⁵The boarding house was near the edge of the town, and soon they were at the crossroads which is beyond its boundary. ¹⁴⁶Here three men were waiting, with whom Lawler and Andrews held a short, eager conversation. ¹⁴⁷Then they all moved on together. ¹⁴⁸It was clearly some notable job which needed numbers. ¹⁴⁹At this point there are several trails which lead to various mines. ¹⁵⁰The strangers took that which led to the Crow Hill, a huge business which was in strong hands which had been able, thanks to their energetic and fearless New England manager, Josiah H. Dunn, to keep some order and discipline during the long reign of terror.

¹⁵¹Day was breaking now, and a line of workmen were slowly making their way, singly and in groups, along the blackened path.

¹⁵²McMurdo and Scanlan strolled on with the others, keeping in sight of the men whom they followed.

¹⁵³A thick mist lay over them, and from the heart of it there came the sudden scream of a steam whistle.

¹⁵⁴It was the ten-minute signal before the cages descended and the day's labour began.

¹⁵⁵When they reached the open space round the mine shaft there were a hundred miners waiting, stamping their feet and blowing on their fingers; for it was bitterly cold. ¹⁵⁶The strangers stood in a little group under the shadow of the engine house. ¹⁵⁷Scanlan and McMurdo climbed a heap of slag from which the whole scene lay before them. ¹⁵⁸They saw the mine engineer, a great bearded Scotchman named Menzies, come out of the engine house and blow his whistle for the cages to be lowered.

¹⁵⁹At the same instant a tall, loose-framed young man with a clean-shaved, earnest face advanced eagerly towards the pit head. ¹⁶⁰As he came forward his eyes fell upon the group, silent and motionless, under the engine house. ¹⁶¹The men had drawn down their hats and turned up their collars to screen their

faces. ¹⁶²For a moment the presentiment of Death laid its cold hand upon the manager's heart. ¹⁶³At the next he had shaken it off and saw only his duty towards intrusive strangers.

¹⁶⁴“Who are you?” he asked as he advanced. ¹⁶⁵“What are you loitering there for?”

¹⁶⁶There was no answer; but the lad Andrews stepped forward and shot him in the stomach. ¹⁶⁷The hundred waiting miners stood as motionless and helpless as if they were paralyzed. ¹⁶⁸The manager clapped his two hands to the wound and doubled himself up. ¹⁶⁹Then he staggered away; but another of the assassins fired, and he went down sidewise, kicking and clawing among a heap of clinkers. ¹⁷⁰Menzies, the Scotchman, gave a roar of rage at the sight and rushed with an iron spanner at the murderers; but was met by two balls in the face which dropped him dead at their very feet.

¹⁷¹There was a surge forward of some of the miners, and an inarticulate cry of pity and of anger; but a couple of the strangers emptied their six-shooters over the heads of the crowd, and they broke and scattered, some of them rushing wildly back to their homes in Vermissa.

¹⁷²When a few of the bravest had rallied, and there was a return to the mine, the murderous gang had vanished in the mists of morning, without a single witness being able to swear to the identity of these men who in front of a hundred spectators had wrought this double crime.

¹⁷³Scanlan and McMurdo made their way back; Scanlan somewhat subdued, for it was the first murder job that he had seen with his own eyes, and it appeared less funny than he had been led to believe. ¹⁷⁴The horrible screams of the dead manager's wife pursued them as they hurried to the town. ¹⁷⁵McMurdo was absorbed and silent; but he showed no sympathy for the weakening of his companion.

¹⁷⁶“Sure, it is like a war,” he repeated. ¹⁷⁷“What is it but a war between us and them, and we hit back where we best can.”

¹⁷⁸There was high revel in the lodge room at the Union House that night, not only over the killing of the manager and engineer of the Crow Hill mine, which would bring this organization into line with the other blackmailed and terror-stricken companies of the district, but also over a distant triumph which had been wrought by the hands of the lodge itself.

¹⁷⁹It would appear that when the County Delegate had sent over five good men to strike a blow in Vermissa, he had demanded that in return three Vermissa men should be secretly selected and sent across to kill William Hales of Stake Royal, one of the best known and most popular mine owners in the Gilmerton district, a man who was believed not to have an enemy in the world; for he was in all ways a model employer. ¹⁸⁰He had insisted, however, upon efficiency in the work, and had, therefore, paid off certain drunken and idle employees who were members of the all-powerful society. ¹⁸¹Coffin notices hung outside his door had not weakened his resolution, and so in a free, civilized country he found himself condemned to death.

¹⁸²The execution had now been duly carried out. ¹⁸³Ted Baldwin, who sprawled now in the seat of honour beside the Bodymaster, had been chief of the party. ¹⁸⁴His flushed face and glazed, blood-shot eyes told of sleeplessness and drink. ¹⁸⁵He and his two comrades had spent the night before among the mountains. ¹⁸⁶They were unkempt and weather-stained. ¹⁸⁷But no heroes, returning from a forlorn hope, could have had a warmer welcome from their comrades.

¹⁸⁸The story was told and retold amid cries of delight and shouts of laughter. ¹⁸⁹They had waited for their man as he drove home at nightfall, taking their station at the top of a steep hill, where his horse must be at a walk. ¹⁹⁰He was so furred to keep out the cold that he could not lay his hand on his pistol. ¹⁹¹They had pulled him out and shot him again and again. ¹⁹²He had screamed for mercy. ¹⁹³The screams were repeated for the amusement of the lodge.

¹⁹⁴“Let's hear again how he squealed,” they cried.

¹⁹⁵None of them knew the man; but there is eternal drama in a killing, and they had shown the Scowrsers of Gilmerton that the Vermissa men were to be relied upon.

¹⁹⁶There had been one contretemps; for a man and his wife had driven up while they were still emptying their revolvers into the silent body. ¹⁹⁷It had been suggested that they should shoot them both; but they were harmless folk who were not connected with the mines, so they were sternly bidden to drive on and keep silent, lest a worse thing befall them. ¹⁹⁸And so the blood-mottled figure had been left as a warning to all such hard-hearted employers, and the three noble avengers had hurried off into the mountains where unbroken nature comes down to the very edge of the furnaces and the slag heaps. ¹⁹⁹Here they were, safe and sound, their work well done, and the plaudits of their companions in their ears.

²⁰⁰It had been a great day for the Scowrsers. ²⁰¹The shadow had fallen even darker over the valley. ²⁰²But as the wise general chooses the moment of victory in which to redouble his efforts, so that his foes may have no time to steady themselves after disaster, so Boss McGinty, looking out upon the scene of his operations with his brooding and malicious eyes, had devised a new attack upon those who opposed him. ²⁰³That very night, as the half-drunken company broke up, he touched McMurdo on the arm and led him aside into that inner room where they had their first interview.

²⁰⁴"See here, my lad," said he, "I've got a job that's worthy of you at last. ²⁰⁵You'll have the doing of it in your own hands."

²⁰⁶"Proud I am to hear it," McMurdo answered.

²⁰⁷"You can take two men with you—Manders and Reilly. ²⁰⁸They have been warned for service. ²⁰⁹We'll never be right in this district until Chester Wilcox has been settled, and you'll have the thanks of every lodge in the coal fields if you can down him."

²¹⁰"I'll do my best, anyhow. ²¹¹Who is he, and where shall I find him?"

²¹²McGinty took his eternal half-chewed, half-smoked cigar from the corner of his mouth, and proceeded to draw a rough diagram on a page torn from his notebook.

²¹³"He's the chief foreman of the Iron Dike Company. ²¹⁴He's a hard citizen, an old colour sergeant of the war, all scars and grizzle. ²¹⁵We've had two tries at him; but had no luck, and Jim Carnaway lost his life over it. ²¹⁶Now it's for you to take it over. ²¹⁷That's the house—all alone at the Iron Dike crossroad, same as you see here on the map—without another within earshot. ²¹⁸It's no good by day. ²¹⁹He's armed and shoots quick and straight, with no questions asked. ²²⁰But at night—well, there he is with his wife, three children, and a hired help. ²²¹You can't pick or choose. ²²²It's all or none. ²²³If you could get a bag of blasting powder at the front door with a slow match to it—"

²²⁴"What's the man done?"

²²⁵"Didn't I tell you he shot Jim Carnaway?"

²²⁶"Why did he shoot him?"

²²⁷"What in thunder has that to do with you? ²²⁸Carnaway was about his house at night, and he shot him. ²²⁹That's enough for me and you. ²³⁰You've got to settle the thing right."

²³¹"There's these two women and the children. ²³²Do they go up too?"

²³³"They have to—else how can we get him?"

²³⁴"It seems hard on them; for they've done nothing."

²³⁵"What sort of fool's talk is this? ²³⁶Do you back out?"

²³⁷“Easy, Councillor, easy! ²³⁸What have I ever said or done that you should think I would be after standing back from an order of the Bodymaster of my own lodge? ²³⁹If it's right or if it's wrong, it's for you to decide.”

²⁴⁰“You'll do it, then?”

²⁴¹“Of course I will do it.”

²⁴²“When?”

²⁴³“Well, you had best give me a night or two that I may see the house and make my plans. ²⁴⁴Then—”

²⁴⁵“Very good,” said McGinty, shaking him by the hand. ²⁴⁶“I leave it with you. ²⁴⁷It will be a great day when you bring us the news. ²⁴⁸It's just the last stroke that will bring them all to their knees.”

²⁴⁹McMurdo thought long and deeply over the commission which had been so suddenly placed in his hands. ²⁵⁰The isolated house in which Chester Wilcox lived was about five miles off in an adjacent valley. ²⁵¹That very night he started off all alone to prepare for the attempt. ²⁵²It was daylight before he returned from his reconnaissance. ²⁵³Next day he interviewed his two subordinates, Manders and Reilly, reckless youngsters who were as elated as if it were a deer-hunt.

²⁵⁴Two nights later they met outside the town, all three armed, and one of them carrying a sack stuffed with the powder which was used in the quarries. ²⁵⁵It was two in the morning before they came to the lonely house. ²⁵⁶The night was a windy one, with broken clouds drifting swiftly across the face of a three-quarter moon. ²⁵⁷They had been warned to be on their guard against bloodhounds; so they moved forward cautiously, with their pistols cocked in their hands. ²⁵⁸But there was no sound save the howling of the wind, and no movement but the swaying branches above them.

²⁵⁹McMurdo listened at the door of the lonely house; but all was still within. ²⁶⁰Then he leaned the powder bag against it, ripped a hole in it with his knife, and attached the fuse. ²⁶¹When it was well alight he and his two companions took to their heels, and were some distance off, safe and snug in a sheltering ditch, before the shattering roar of the explosion, with the low, deep rumble of the collapsing building, told them that their work was done. ²⁶²No cleaner job had ever been carried out in the bloodstained annals of the society.

²⁶³But alas that work so well organized and boldly carried out should all have gone for nothing! ²⁶⁴Warned by the fate of the various victims, and knowing that he was marked down for destruction, Chester Wilcox had moved himself and his family only the day before to some safer and less known quarters, where a guard of police should watch over them. ²⁶⁵It was an empty house which had been torn down by the gunpowder, and the grim old colour sergeant of the war was still teaching discipline to the miners of Iron Dike.

²⁶⁶“Leave him to me,” said McMurdo. ²⁶⁷“He's my man, and I'll get him sure if I have to wait a year for him.”

²⁶⁸A vote of thanks and confidence was passed in full lodge, and so for the time the matter ended.

²⁶⁹When a few weeks later it was reported in the papers that Wilcox had been shot at from an ambuscade, it was an open secret that McMurdo was still at work upon his unfinished job.

²⁷⁰Such were the methods of the Society of Freemen, and such were the deeds of the Scowrrers by which they spread their rule of fear over the great and rich district which was for so long a period haunted by their terrible presence. ²⁷¹Why should these pages be stained by further crimes? ²⁷²Have I not said enough to show the men and their methods?

²⁷³These deeds are written in history, and there are records wherein one may read the details of them.

²⁷⁴There one may learn of the shooting of Policemen Hunt and Evans because they had ventured to

arrest two members of the society—a double outrage planned at the Vermissa lodge and carried out in cold blood upon two helpless and disarmed men. ²⁷⁵There also one may read of the shooting of Mrs. Larbey when she was nursing her husband, who had been beaten almost to death by orders of Boss McGinty. ²⁷⁶The killing of the elder Jenkins, shortly followed by that of his brother, the mutilation of James Murdoch, the blowing up of the Staphouse family, and the murder of the Stendals all followed hard upon one another in the same terrible winter.

²⁷⁷Darkly the shadow lay upon the Valley of Fear. ²⁷⁸The spring had come with running brooks and blossoming trees. ²⁷⁹There was hope for all Nature bound so long in an iron grip; but nowhere was there any hope for the men and women who lived under the yoke of the terror. ²⁸⁰Never had the cloud above them been so dark and hopeless as in the early summer of the year 1875.

Chapter XIII.

Danger

¹It was the height of the reign of terror. McMurdo, who had already been appointed Inner Deacon, with every prospect of some day succeeding McGinty as Bodymaster, was now so necessary to the councils of his comrades that nothing was done without his help and advice. ²The more popular he became, however, with the Freemen, the blacker were the scowls which greeted him as he passed along the streets of Vermissa. ³In spite of their terror the citizens were taking heart to band themselves together against their oppressors. ⁴Rumours had reached the lodge of secret gatherings in the Herald office and of distribution of firearms among the law-abiding people. ⁵But McGinty and his men were undisturbed by such reports. ⁶They were numerous, resolute, and well armed. ⁷Their opponents were scattered and powerless. ⁸It would all end, as it had done in the past, in aimless talk and possibly in impotent arrests. ⁹So said McGinty, McMurdo, and all the bolder spirits.

¹⁰It was a Saturday evening in May. ¹¹Saturday was always the lodge night, and McMurdo was leaving his house to attend it when Morris, the weaker brother of the order, came to see him. ¹²His brow was creased with care, and his kindly face was drawn and haggard.

¹³"Can I speak with you freely, Mr. McMurdo?"

¹⁴"Sure."

¹⁵"I can't forget that I spoke my heart to you once, and that you kept it to yourself, even though the Boss himself came to ask you about it."

¹⁶"What else could I do if you trusted me? ¹⁷It wasn't that I agreed with what you said."

¹⁸"I know that well. ¹⁹But you are the one that I can speak to and be safe. ²⁰I've a secret here," he put his hand to his breast, "and it is just burning the life out of me. ²¹I wish it had come to any one of you but me. ²²If I tell it, it will mean murder, for sure. ²³If I don't, it may bring the end of us all. ²⁴God help me, but I am near out of my wits over it!"

²⁵McMurdo looked at the man earnestly. ²⁶He was trembling in every limb. ²⁷He poured some whisky into a glass and handed it to him. ²⁸"That's the physic for the likes of you," said he. ²⁹"Now let me hear of it."

³⁰Morris drank, and his white face took a tinge of colour. ³¹"I can tell it to you all in one sentence," said he. ³²"There's a detective on our trail."

³³McMurdo stared at him in astonishment. ³⁴"Why, man, you're crazy," he said. ³⁵"Isn't the place full of police and detectives and what harm did they ever do us?"

³⁶"No, no, it's no man of the district. ³⁷As you say, we know them, and it is little that they can do. ³⁸But you've heard of Pinkerton's?"

³⁹"I've read of some folk of that name."

⁴⁰"Well, you can take it from me you've no show when they are on your trail. ⁴¹It's not a take-it-or-miss-it government concern. ⁴²It's a dead earnest business proposition that's out for results and keeps out till by hook or crook it gets them. ⁴³If a Pinkerton man is deep in this business, we are all destroyed."

⁴⁴"We must kill him."

⁴⁵“Ah, it's the first thought that came to you! ⁴⁶So it will be up at the lodge. ⁴⁷Didn't I say to you that it would end in murder?”

⁴⁸“Sure, what is murder? ⁴⁹Isn't it common enough in these parts?”

⁵⁰“It is, indeed; but it's not for me to point out the man that is to be murdered. ⁵¹I'd never rest easy again.

⁵²And yet it's our own necks that may be at stake. ⁵³In God's name what shall I do?” ⁵⁴He rocked to and fro in his agony of indecision.

⁵⁵But his words had moved McMurdo deeply. ⁵⁶It was easy to see that he shared the other's opinion as to the danger, and the need for meeting it. ⁵⁷He gripped Morris's shoulder and shook him in his earnestness.

⁵⁸“See here, man,” he cried, and he almost screeched the words in his excitement, “you won't gain anything by sitting keening like an old wife at a wake. ⁵⁹Let's have the facts. ⁶⁰Who is the fellow? ⁶¹Where is he? ⁶²How did you hear of him? ⁶³Why did you come to me?”

⁶⁴“I came to you; for you are the one man that would advise me. ⁶⁵I told you that I had a store in the East before I came here. ⁶⁶I left good friends behind me, and one of them is in the telegraph service. ⁶⁷Here's a letter that I had from him yesterday. ⁶⁸It's this part from the top of the page. ⁶⁹You can read it yourself.”

⁷⁰This was what McMurdo read:

⁷¹How are the Scowrs getting on in your parts? ⁷²We read plenty of them in the papers. ⁷³Between you and me I expect to hear news from you before long. ⁷⁴Five big corporations and the two railroads have taken the thing up in dead earnest. ⁷⁵They mean it, and you can bet they'll get there! ⁷⁶They are right deep down into it. ⁷⁷Pinkerton has taken hold under their orders, and his best man, Birdy Edwards, is operating. ⁷⁸The thing has got to be stopped right now.

⁷⁹“Now read the postscript.”

⁸⁰Of course, what I give you is what I learned in business; so it goes no further. ⁸¹It's a queer cipher that you handle by the yard every day and can get no meaning from.

⁸²McMurdo sat in silence for some time, with the letter in his listless hands. ⁸³The mist had lifted for a moment, and there was the abyss before him.

⁸⁴“Does anyone else know of this?” he asked.

⁸⁵“I have told no one else.”

⁸⁶“But this man—your friend—has he any other person that he would be likely to write to?”

⁸⁷“Well, I dare say he knows one or two more.”

⁸⁸“Of the lodge?”

⁸⁹“It's likely enough.”

⁹⁰“I was asking because it is likely that he may have given some description of this fellow Birdy Edwards—then we could get on his trail.”

⁹¹“Well, it's possible. ⁹²But I should not think he knew him. ⁹³He is just telling me the news that came to him by way of business. ⁹⁴How would he know this Pinkerton man?”

⁹⁵McMurdo gave a violent start.

⁹⁶“By Gar!” he cried, “I’ve got him. ⁹⁷What a fool I was not to know it. ⁹⁸Lord! but we’re in luck! ⁹⁹We will fix him before he can do any harm. ¹⁰⁰See here, Morris, will you leave this thing in my hands?”

¹⁰¹“Sure, if you will only take it off mine.”

¹⁰²“I’ll do that. ¹⁰³You can stand right back and let me run it. ¹⁰⁴Even your name need not be mentioned.

¹⁰⁵I’ll take it all on myself, as if it were to me that this letter has come. ¹⁰⁶Will that content you?”

¹⁰⁷“It’s just what I would ask.”

¹⁰⁸“Then leave it at that and keep your head shut. ¹⁰⁹Now I’ll get down to the lodge, and we’ll soon make old man Pinkerton sorry for himself.”

¹¹⁰“You wouldn’t kill this man?”

¹¹¹“The less you know, Friend Morris, the easier your conscience will be, and the better you will sleep.

¹¹²Ask no questions, and let these things settle themselves. ¹¹³I have hold of it now.”

¹¹⁴Morris shook his head sadly as he left. ¹¹⁵“I feel that his blood is on my hands,” he groaned.

¹¹⁶“Self-protection is no murder, anyhow,” said McMurdo, smiling grimly. ¹¹⁷“It’s him or us. ¹¹⁸I guess this man would destroy us all if we left him long in the valley. ¹¹⁹Why, Brother Morris, we’ll have to elect you Bodymaster yet; for you’ve surely saved the lodge.”

¹²⁰And yet it was clear from his actions that he thought more seriously of this new intrusion than his words would show. ¹²¹It may have been his guilty conscience, it may have been the reputation of the Pinkerton organization, it may have been the knowledge that great, rich corporations had set themselves the task of clearing out the Scowrs; but, whatever his reason, his actions were those of a man who is preparing for the worst. ¹²²Every paper which would incriminate him was destroyed before he left the house. ¹²³After that he gave a long sigh of satisfaction; for it seemed to him that he was safe. ¹²⁴And yet the danger must still have pressed somewhat upon him; for on his way to the lodge he stopped at old man Shafter’s. ¹²⁵The house was forbidden him; but when he tapped at the window Ettie came out to him. ¹²⁶The dancing Irish deviltry had gone from her lover’s eyes. ¹²⁷She read his danger in his earnest face.

¹²⁸“Something has happened!” she cried. ¹²⁹“Oh, Jack, you are in danger!”

¹³⁰“Sure, it is not very bad, my sweetheart. ¹³¹And yet it may be wise that we make a move before it is worse.”

¹³²“Make a move?”

¹³³“I promised you once that I would go some day. ¹³⁴I think the time is coming. ¹³⁵I had news to-night, bad news, and I see trouble coming.”

¹³⁶“The police?”

¹³⁷“Well, a Pinkerton. ¹³⁸But, sure, you wouldn’t know what that is, acushla, nor what it may mean to the likes of me. ¹³⁹I’m too deep in this thing, and I may have to get out of it quick. ¹⁴⁰You said you would come with me if I went.”

¹⁴¹“Oh, Jack, it would be the saving of you!”

¹⁴²“I’m an honest man in some things, Ettie. ¹⁴³I wouldn’t hurt a hair of your bonny head for all that the world can give, nor ever pull you down one inch from the golden throne above the clouds where I always see you. ¹⁴⁴Would you trust me?”

¹⁴⁵She put her hand in his without a word. ¹⁴⁶“Well, then, listen to what I say, and do as I order you, for indeed it's the only way for us. ¹⁴⁷Things are going to happen in this valley. ¹⁴⁸I feel it in my bones. ¹⁴⁹There may be many of us that will have to look out for ourselves. ¹⁵⁰I'm one, anyhow. ¹⁵¹If I go, by day or night, it's you that must come with me!”

¹⁵²“I'd come after you, Jack.”

¹⁵³“No, no, you shall come with me. ¹⁵⁴If this valley is closed to me and I can never come back, how can I leave you behind, and me perhaps in hiding from the police with never a chance of a message? ¹⁵⁵It's with me you must come. ¹⁵⁶I know a good woman in the place I come from, and it's there I'd leave you till we can get married. ¹⁵⁷Will you come?”

¹⁵⁸“Yes, Jack, I will come.”

¹⁵⁹“God bless you for your trust in me! ¹⁶⁰It's a fiend out of hell that I should be if I abused it. ¹⁶¹Now, mark you, Ettie, it will be just a word to you, and when it reaches you, you will drop everything and come right down to the waiting room at the depot and stay there till I come for you.”

¹⁶²“Day or night, I'll come at the word, Jack.”

¹⁶³Somewhat eased in mind, now that his own preparations for escape had been begun, McMurdo went on to the lodge. ¹⁶⁴It had already assembled, and only by complicated signs and counter-signs could he pass through the outer guard and inner guard who close-tiled it. ¹⁶⁵A buzz of pleasure and welcome greeted him as he entered. ¹⁶⁶The long room was crowded, and through the haze of tobacco smoke he saw the tangled black mane of the Bodymaster, the cruel, unfriendly features of Baldwin, the vulture face of Harraway, the secretary, and a dozen more who were among the leaders of the lodge. ¹⁶⁷He rejoiced that they should all be there to take counsel over his news.

¹⁶⁸“Indeed, it's glad we are to see you, Brother!” cried the chairman. ¹⁶⁹“There's business here that wants a Solomon in judgment to set it right.”

¹⁷⁰“It's Lander and Egan,” explained his neighbour as he took his seat. ¹⁷¹“They both claim the head money given by the lodge for the shooting of old man Crabbe over at Stylestown, and who's to say which fired the bullet?”

¹⁷²McMurdo rose in his place and raised his hand. ¹⁷³The expression of his face froze the attention of the audience. ¹⁷⁴There was a dead hush of expectation.

¹⁷⁵“Eminent Bodymaster,” he said, in a solemn voice, “I claim urgency!”

¹⁷⁶“Brother McMurdo claims urgency,” said McGinty. ¹⁷⁷“It's a claim that by the rules of this lodge takes precedence. ¹⁷⁸Now Brother, we attend you.”

¹⁷⁹McMurdo took the letter from his pocket.

¹⁸⁰“Eminent Bodymaster and Brethren,” he said, “I am the bearer of ill news this day; but it is better that it should be known and discussed, than that a blow should fall upon us without warning which would destroy us all. ¹⁸¹I have information that the most powerful and richest organizations in this state have bound themselves together for our destruction, and that at this very moment there is a Pinkerton detective, one Birdy Edwards, at work in the valley collecting the evidence which may put a rope round the necks of many of us, and send every man in this room into a felon's cell. ¹⁸²That is the situation for the discussion of which I have made a claim of urgency.”

¹⁸³There was a dead silence in the room. ¹⁸⁴It was broken by the chairman.

¹⁸⁵“What is your evidence for this, Brother McMurdo?” he asked.

¹⁸⁶“It is in this letter which has come into my hands,” said McMurdo. ¹⁸⁷He read the passage aloud. ¹⁸⁸“It is a matter of honour with me that I can give no further particulars about the letter, nor put it into your hands; but I assure you that there is nothing else in it which can affect the interests of the lodge. ¹⁸⁹I put the case before you as it has reached me.”

¹⁹⁰“Let me say, Mr. Chairman,” said one of the older brethren, “that I have heard of Birdy Edwards, and that he has the name of being the best man in the Pinkerton service.”

¹⁹¹“Does anyone know him by sight?” asked McGinty.

¹⁹²“Yes,” said McMurdo, “I do.”

¹⁹³There was a murmur of astonishment through the hall.

¹⁹⁴“I believe we hold him in the hollow of our hands,” he continued with an exulting smile upon his face. ¹⁹⁵“If we act quickly and wisely, we can cut this thing short. ¹⁹⁶If I have your confidence and your help, it is little that we have to fear.”

¹⁹⁷“What have we to fear, anyhow? ¹⁹⁸What can he know of our affairs?”

¹⁹⁹“You might say so if all were as stanch as you, Councillor. ²⁰⁰But this man has all the millions of the capitalists at his back. ²⁰¹Do you think there is no weaker brother among all our lodges that could not be bought? ²⁰²He will get at our secrets—maybe has got them already. ²⁰³There's only one sure cure.”

²⁰⁴“That he never leaves the valley,” said Baldwin.

²⁰⁵McMurdo nodded. ²⁰⁶“Good for you, Brother Baldwin,” he said. ²⁰⁷“You and I have had our differences, but you have said the true word to-night.”

²⁰⁸“Where is he, then? ²⁰⁹Where shall we know him?”

²¹⁰“Eminent Bodymaster,” said McMurdo, earnestly, “I would put it to you that this is too vital a thing for us to discuss in open lodge. ²¹¹God forbid that I should throw a doubt on anyone here; but if so much as a word of gossip got to the ears of this man, there would be an end of any chance of our getting him. ²¹²I would ask the lodge to choose a trusty committee, Mr. Chairman—yourself, if I might suggest it, and Brother Baldwin here, and five more. ²¹³Then I can talk freely of what I know and of what I advise should be done.”

²¹⁴The proposition was at once adopted, and the committee chosen. ²¹⁵Besides the chairman and Baldwin there were the vulture-faced secretary, Harraway, Tiger Cormac, the brutal young assassin, Carter, the treasurer, and the brothers Willaby, fearless and desperate men who would stick at nothing.

²¹⁶The usual revelry of the lodge was short and subdued: for there was a cloud upon the men's spirits, and many there for the first time began to see the cloud of avenging Law drifting up in that serene sky under which they had dwelt so long. ²¹⁷The horrors they had dealt out to others had been so much a part of their settled lives that the thought of retribution had become a remote one, and so seemed the more startling now that it came so closely upon them. ²¹⁸They broke up early and left their leaders to their council.

²¹⁹“Now, McMurdo!” said McGinty when they were alone. ²²⁰The seven men sat frozen in their seats.

²²¹“I said just now that I knew Birdy Edwards,” McMurdo explained. ²²²“I need not tell you that he is not here under that name. ²²³He's a brave man, but not a crazy one. ²²⁴He passes under the name of Steve Wilson, and he is lodging at Hobson's Patch.”

²²⁵“How do you know this?”

²²⁶“Because I fell into talk with him. ²²⁷I thought little of it at the time, nor would have given it a second thought but for this letter; but now I'm sure it's the man. ²²⁸I met him on the cars when I went down the line on Wednesday—a hard case if ever there was one. ²²⁹He said he was a reporter. ²³⁰I believed it for the moment. ²³¹Wanted to know all he could about the Scowlers and what he called ‘the outrages’ for a New York paper. ²³²Asked me every kind of question so as to get something. ²³³You bet I was giving nothing away. ²³⁴‘I'd pay for it and pay well,’ said he, ‘if I could get some stuff that would suit my editor.’ ²³⁵I said what I thought would please him best, and he handed me a twenty-dollar bill for my information. ²³⁶‘There's ten times that for you,’ said he, ‘if you can find me all that I want.’”

²³⁷“What did you tell him, then?”

²³⁸“Any stuff I could make up.”

²³⁹“How do you know he wasn't a newspaper man?”

²⁴⁰“I'll tell you. ²⁴¹He got out at Hobson's Patch, and so did I. ²⁴²I chanced into the telegraph bureau, and he was leaving it.

²⁴³“‘See here,’ said the operator after he'd gone out, ‘I guess we should charge double rates for this.’—
²⁴⁴‘I guess you should,’ said I. ²⁴⁵He had filled the form with stuff that might have been Chinese, for all we could make of it. ²⁴⁶‘He fires a sheet of this off every day,’ said the clerk. ²⁴⁷‘Yes,’ said I; ‘it's special news for his paper, and he's scared that the others should tap it.’ ²⁴⁸That was what the operator thought and what I thought at the time; but I think differently now.”

²⁴⁹“By Gar! ²⁵⁰I believe you are right,” said McGinty. ²⁵¹“But what do you allow that we should do about it?”

²⁵²“Why not go right down now and fix him?” someone suggested.

²⁵³“Ay, the sooner the better.”

²⁵⁴“I'd start this next minute if I knew where we could find him,” said McMurdo. ²⁵⁵“He's in Hobson's Patch; but I don't know the house. ²⁵⁶I've got a plan, though, if you'll only take my advice.”

²⁵⁷“Well, what is it?”

²⁵⁸“I'll go to the Patch to-morrow morning. ²⁵⁹I'll find him through the operator. ²⁶⁰He can locate him, I guess. ²⁶¹Well, then I'll tell him that I'm a Freeman myself. ²⁶²I'll offer him all the secrets of the lodge for a price. ²⁶³You bet he'll tumble to it. ²⁶⁴I'll tell him the papers are at my house, and that it's as much as my life would be worth to let him come while folk were about. ²⁶⁵He'll see that that's horse sense. ²⁶⁶Let him come at ten o'clock at night, and he shall see everything. ²⁶⁷That will fetch him sure.”

²⁶⁸“Well?”

²⁶⁹“You can plan the rest for yourselves. ²⁷⁰Widow MacNamara's is a lonely house. ²⁷¹She's as true as steel and as deaf as a post. ²⁷²There's only Scanlan and me in the house. ²⁷³If I get his promise—and I'll let you know if I do—I'd have the whole seven of you come to me by nine o'clock. ²⁷⁴We'll get him in. ²⁷⁵If ever he gets out alive—well, he can talk of Birdy Edwards's luck for the rest of his days!”

²⁷⁶“There's going to be a vacancy at Pinkerton's or I'm mistaken. ²⁷⁷Leave it at that, McMurdo. ²⁷⁸At nine to-morrow we'll be with you. ²⁷⁹You once get the door shut behind him, and you can leave the rest with us.”

Chapter XIV.

The Trapping of Birdy Edwards

¹As McMurdo had said, the house in which he lived was a lonely one and very well suited for such a crime as they had planned. ²It was on the extreme fringe of the town and stood well back from the road. ³In any other case the conspirators would have simply called out their man, as they had many a time before, and emptied their pistols into his body; but in this instance it was very necessary to find out how much he knew, how he knew it, and what had been passed on to his employers.

⁴It was possible that they were already too late and that the work had been done. ⁵If that was indeed so, they could at least have their revenge upon the man who had done it. ⁶But they were hopeful that nothing of great importance had yet come to the detective's knowledge, as otherwise, they argued, he would not have troubled to write down and forward such trivial information as McMurdo claimed to have given him. ⁷However, all this they would learn from his own lips. ⁸Once in their power, they would find a way to make him speak. ⁹It was not the first time that they had handled an unwilling witness.

¹⁰McMurdo went to Hobson's Patch as agreed. ¹¹The police seemed to take particular interest in him that morning, and Captain Marvin—he who had claimed the old acquaintance with him at Chicago—actually addressed him as he waited at the station. ¹²McMurdo turned away and refused to speak with him. ¹³He was back from his mission in the afternoon, and saw McGinty at the Union House.

¹⁴“He is coming,” he said.

¹⁵“Good!” said McGinty. ¹⁶The giant was in his shirt sleeves, with chains and seals gleaming athwart his ample waistcoat and a diamond twinkling through the fringe of his bristling beard. ¹⁷Drink and politics had made the Boss a very rich as well as powerful man. ¹⁸The more terrible, therefore, seemed that glimpse of the prison or the gallows which had risen before him the night before.

¹⁹“Do you reckon he knows much?” he asked anxiously.

²⁰McMurdo shook his head gloomily. ²¹“He's been here some time—six weeks at the least. ²²I guess he didn't come into these parts to look at the prospect. ²³If he has been working among us all that time with the railroad money at his back, I should expect that he has got results, and that he has passed them on.”

²⁴“There's not a weak man in the lodge,” cried McGinty. ²⁵“True as steel, every man of them. ²⁶And yet, by the Lord! there is that skunk Morris. ²⁷What about him? ²⁸If any man gives us away, it would be he. ²⁹I've a mind to send a couple of the boys round before evening to give him a beating up and see what they can get from him.”

³⁰“Well, there would be no harm in that,” McMurdo answered. ³¹“I won't deny that I have a liking for Morris and would be sorry to see him come to harm. ³²He has spoken to me once or twice over lodge matters, and though he may not see them the same as you or I, he never seemed the sort that squeals. ³³But still it is not for me to stand between him and you.”

³⁴“I'll fix the old devil!” said McGinty with an oath. ³⁵“I've had my eye on him this year past.”

³⁶“Well, you know best about that,” McMurdo answered. ³⁷“But whatever you do must be to-morrow; for we must lie low until the Pinkerton affair is settled up. ³⁸We can't afford to set the police buzzing, to-day of all days.”

³⁹“True for you,” said McGinty. ⁴⁰“And we'll learn from Birdy Edwards himself where he got his news if we have to cut his heart out first. ⁴¹Did he seem to scent a trap?”

⁴²McMurdo laughed. ⁴³"I guess I took him on his weak point," he said. ⁴⁴"If he could get on a good trail of the Scowrers, he's ready to follow it into hell. ⁴⁵I took his money," McMurdo grinned as he produced a wad of dollar notes, "and as much more when he has seen all my papers."

⁴⁶"What papers?"

⁴⁷"Well, there are no papers. ⁴⁸But I filled him up about constitutions and books of rules and forms of membership. ⁴⁹He expects to get right down to the end of everything before he leaves."

⁵⁰"Faith, he's right there," said McGinty grimly. ⁵¹"Didn't he ask you why you didn't bring him the papers?"

⁵²"As if I would carry such things, and me a suspected man, and Captain Marvin after speaking to me this very day at the depot!"

⁵³"Ay, I heard of that," said McGinty. ⁵⁴"I guess the heavy end of this business is coming on to you. ⁵⁵We could put him down an old shaft when we've done with him; but however we work it we can't get past the man living at Hobson's Patch and you being there to-day."

⁵⁶McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. ⁵⁷"If we handle it right, they can never prove the killing," said he. ⁵⁸"No one can see him come to the house after dark, and I'll lay to it that no one will see him go. ⁵⁹Now see here, Councillor, I'll show you my plan and I'll ask you to fit the others into it. ⁶⁰You will all come in good time. ⁶¹Very well. ⁶²He comes at ten. ⁶³He is to tap three times, and me to open the door for him. ⁶⁴Then I'll get behind him and shut it. ⁶⁵He's our man then."

⁶⁶"That's all easy and plain."

⁶⁷"Yes; but the next step wants considering. ⁶⁸He's a hard proposition. ⁶⁹He's heavily armed. ⁷⁰I've fooled him proper, and yet he is likely to be on his guard. ⁷¹Suppose I show him right into a room with seven men in it where he expected to find me alone. ⁷²There is going to be shooting, and somebody is going to be hurt."

⁷³"That's so."

⁷⁴"And the noise is going to bring every damned copper in the township on top of it."

⁷⁵"I guess you are right."

⁷⁶"This is how I should work it. ⁷⁷You will all be in the big room—same as you saw when you had a chat with me. ⁷⁸I'll open the door for him, show him into the parlour beside the door, and leave him there while I get the papers. ⁷⁹That will give me the chance of telling you how things are shaping. ⁸⁰Then I will go back to him with some faked papers. ⁸¹As he is reading them I will jump for him and get my grip on his pistol arm. ⁸²You'll hear me call and in you will rush. ⁸³The quicker the better; for he is as strong a man as I, and I may have more than I can manage. ⁸⁴But I allow that I can hold him till you come."

⁸⁵"It's a good plan," said McGinty. ⁸⁶"The lodge will owe you a debt for this. ⁸⁷I guess when I move out of the chair I can put a name to the man that's coming after me."

⁸⁸"Sure, Councillor, I am little more than a recruit," said McMurdo; but his face showed what he thought of the great man's compliment.

⁸⁹When he had returned home he made his own preparations for the grim evening in front of him. ⁹⁰First he cleaned, oiled, and loaded his Smith & Wesson revolver. ⁹¹Then he surveyed the room in which the detective was to be trapped. ⁹²It was a large apartment, with a long deal table in the centre, and the big stove at one side. ⁹³At each of the other sides were windows. ⁹⁴There were no shutters on these: only light curtains which drew across. ⁹⁵McMurdo examined these attentively. ⁹⁶No doubt it must have struck

him that the apartment was very exposed for so secret a meeting. ⁹⁷Yet its distance from the road made it of less consequence. ⁹⁸Finally he discussed the matter with his fellow lodger. ⁹⁹Scanlan, though a Scowrer, was an inoffensive little man who was too weak to stand against the opinion of his comrades, but was secretly horrified by the deeds of blood at which he had sometimes been forced to assist. ¹⁰⁰McMurdo told him shortly what was intended.

¹⁰¹"And if I were you, Mike Scanlan, I would take a night off and keep clear of it. ¹⁰²There will be bloody work here before morning."

¹⁰³"Well, indeed then, Mac," Scanlan answered. ¹⁰⁴"It's not the will but the nerve that is wanting in me. ¹⁰⁵When I saw Manager Dunn go down at the colliery yonder it was just more than I could stand. ¹⁰⁶I'm not made for it, same as you or McGinty. ¹⁰⁷If the lodge will think none the worse of me, I'll just do as you advise and leave you to yourselves for the evening."

¹⁰⁸The men came in good time as arranged. ¹⁰⁹They were outwardly respectable citizens, well clad and cleanly; but a judge of faces would have read little hope for Birdy Edwards in those hard mouths and remorseless eyes. ¹¹⁰There was not a man in the room whose hands had not been reddened a dozen times before. ¹¹¹They were as hardened to human murder as a butcher to sheep.

¹¹²Foremost, of course, both in appearance and in guilt, was the formidable Boss. ¹¹³Harraway, the secretary, was a lean, bitter man with a long, scraggy neck and nervous, jerky limbs, a man of incorruptible fidelity where the finances of the order were concerned, and with no notion of justice or honesty to anyone beyond. ¹¹⁴The treasurer, Carter, was a middle-aged man, with an impassive, rather sulky expression, and a yellow parchment skin. ¹¹⁵He was a capable organizer, and the actual details of nearly every outrage had sprung from his plotting brain. ¹¹⁶The two Willabys were men of action, tall, lithe young fellows with determined faces, while their companion, Tiger Cormac, a heavy, dark youth, was feared even by his own comrades for the ferocity of his disposition. ¹¹⁷These were the men who assembled that night under the roof of McMurdo for the killing of the Pinkerton detective.

¹¹⁸Their host had placed whisky upon the table, and they had hastened to prime themselves for the work before them. ¹¹⁹Baldwin and Cormac were already half-drunk, and the liquor had brought out all their ferocity. ¹²⁰Cormac placed his hands on the stove for an instant—it had been lighted, for the nights were still cold.

¹²¹"That will do," said he, with an oath.

¹²²"Ay," said Baldwin, catching his meaning. ¹²³"If he is strapped to that, we will have the truth out of him."

¹²⁴"We'll have the truth out of him, never fear," said McMurdo. ¹²⁵He had nerves of steel, this man; for though the whole weight of the affair was on him his manner was as cool and unconcerned as ever. ¹²⁶The others marked it and applauded.

¹²⁷"You are the one to handle him," said the Boss approvingly. ¹²⁸"Not a warning will he get till your hand is on his throat. ¹²⁹It's a pity there are no shutters to your windows."

¹³⁰McMurdo went from one to the other and drew the curtains tighter. ¹³¹"Sure no one can spy upon us now. ¹³²It's close upon the hour."

¹³³"Maybe he won't come. ¹³⁴Maybe he'll get a sniff of danger," said the secretary.

¹³⁵"He'll come, never fear," McMurdo answered. ¹³⁶"He is as eager to come as you can be to see him. ¹³⁷Hark to that!"

¹³⁸They all sat like wax figures, some with their glasses arrested halfway to their lips. ¹³⁹Three loud knocks had sounded at the door.

¹⁴⁰“Hush!” ¹⁴¹McMurdo raised his hand in caution. ¹⁴²An exulting glance went round the circle, and hands were laid upon hidden weapons.

¹⁴³“Not a sound, for your lives!” McMurdo whispered, as he went from the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

¹⁴⁴With strained ears the murderers waited. ¹⁴⁵They counted the steps of their comrade down the passage. ¹⁴⁶Then they heard him open the outer door. ¹⁴⁷There were a few words as of greeting. ¹⁴⁸Then they were aware of a strange step inside and of an unfamiliar voice. ¹⁴⁹An instant later came the slam of the door and the turning of the key in the lock. ¹⁵⁰Their prey was safe within the trap. ¹⁵¹Tiger Cormac laughed horribly, and Boss McGinty clapped his great hand across his mouth.

¹⁵²“Be quiet, you fool!” he whispered. ¹⁵³“You’ll be the undoing of us yet!”

¹⁵⁴There was a mutter of conversation from the next room. ¹⁵⁵It seemed interminable. ¹⁵⁶Then the door opened, and McMurdo appeared, his finger upon his lip.

¹⁵⁷He came to the end of the table and looked round at them. ¹⁵⁸A subtle change had come over him. ¹⁵⁹His manner was as of one who has great work to do. ¹⁶⁰His face had set into granite firmness. ¹⁶¹His eyes shone with a fierce excitement behind his spectacles. ¹⁶²He had become a visible leader of men. ¹⁶³They stared at him with eager interest; but he said nothing. ¹⁶⁴Still with the same singular gaze he looked from man to man.

¹⁶⁵“Well!” cried Boss McGinty at last. ¹⁶⁶“Is he here? ¹⁶⁷Is Birdy Edwards here?”

¹⁶⁸“Yes,” McMurdo answered slowly. ¹⁶⁹“Birdy Edwards is here. ¹⁷⁰I am Birdy Edwards!”

¹⁷¹There were ten seconds after that brief speech during which the room might have been empty, so profound was the silence. ¹⁷²The hissing of a kettle upon the stove rose sharp and strident to the ear. ¹⁷³Seven white faces, all turned upward to this man who dominated them, were set motionless with utter terror. ¹⁷⁴Then, with a sudden shivering of glass, a bristle of glistening rifle barrels broke through each window, while the curtains were torn from their hangings.

¹⁷⁵At the sight Boss McGinty gave the roar of a wounded bear and plunged for the half-opened door. ¹⁷⁶A levelled revolver met him there with the stern blue eyes of Captain Marvin of the Mine Police gleaming behind the sights. ¹⁷⁷The Boss recoiled and fell back into his chair.

¹⁷⁸“You’re safer there, Councillor,” said the man whom they had known as McMurdo. ¹⁷⁹“And you, Baldwin, if you don’t take your hand off your pistol, you’ll cheat the hangman yet. ¹⁸⁰Pull it out, or by the Lord that made me— ¹⁸¹There, that will do. ¹⁸²There are forty armed men round this house, and you can figure it out for yourself what chance you have. ¹⁸³Take their pistols, Marvin!”

¹⁸⁴There was no possible resistance under the menace of those rifles. ¹⁸⁵The men were disarmed. ¹⁸⁶Sulky, sheepish, and amazed, they still sat round the table.

¹⁸⁷“I’d like to say a word to you before we separate,” said the man who had trapped them. ¹⁸⁸“I guess we may not meet again until you see me on the stand in the courthouse. ¹⁸⁹I’ll give you something to think over between now and then. ¹⁹⁰You know me now for what I am. ¹⁹¹At last I can put my cards on the table. ¹⁹²I am Birdy Edwards of Pinkerton’s. ¹⁹³I was chosen to break up your gang. ¹⁹⁴I had a hard and dangerous game to play. ¹⁹⁵Not a soul, not one soul, not my nearest and dearest, knew that I was playing it. ¹⁹⁶Only Captain Marvin here and my employers knew that. ¹⁹⁷But it’s over to-night, thank God, and I am the winner!”

¹⁹⁸The seven pale, rigid faces looked up at him. ¹⁹⁹There was unappeasable hatred in their eyes. ²⁰⁰He read the relentless threat.

²⁰¹“Maybe you think that the game is not over yet. ²⁰²Well, I take my chance of that. ²⁰³Anyhow, some of you will take no further hand, and there are sixty more besides yourselves that will see a jail this night. ²⁰⁴I’ll tell you this, that when I was put upon this job I never believed there was such a society as yours. ²⁰⁵I thought it was paper talk, and that I would prove it so. ²⁰⁶They told me it was to do with the Freeman; so I went to Chicago and was made one. ²⁰⁷Then I was surer than ever that it was just paper talk; for I found no harm in the society, but a deal of good.

²⁰⁸“Still, I had to carry out my job, and I came to the coal valleys. ²⁰⁹When I reached this place I learned that I was wrong and that it wasn’t a dime novel after all. ²¹⁰So I stayed to look after it. ²¹¹I never killed a man in Chicago. ²¹²I never minted a dollar in my life. ²¹³Those I gave you were as good as any others; but I never spent money better. ²¹⁴But I knew the way into your good wishes and so I pretended to you that the law was after me. ²¹⁵It all worked just as I thought.

²¹⁶“So I joined your infernal lodge, and I took my share in your councils. ²¹⁷Maybe they will say that I was as bad as you. ²¹⁸They can say what they like, so long as I get you. ²¹⁹But what is the truth? ²²⁰The night I joined you beat up old man Stanger. ²²¹I could not warn him, for there was no time; but I held your hand, Baldwin, when you would have killed him. ²²²If ever I have suggested things, so as to keep my place among you, they were things which I knew I could prevent. ²²³I could not save Dunn and Menzies, for I did not know enough; but I will see that their murderers are hanged. ²²⁴I gave Chester Wilcox warning, so that when I blew his house in he and his folk were in hiding. ²²⁵There was many a crime that I could not stop; but if you look back and think how often your man came home the other road, or was down in town when you went for him, or stayed indoors when you thought he would come out, you’ll see my work.”

²²⁶“You blasted traitor!” hissed McGinty through his closed teeth.

²²⁷“Ay, John McGinty, you may call me that if it eases your smart. ²²⁸You and your like have been the enemy of God and man in these parts. ²²⁹It took a man to get between you and the poor devils of men and women that you held under your grip. ²³⁰There was just one way of doing it, and I did it. ²³¹You call me a traitor; but I guess there’s many a thousand will call me a deliverer that went down into hell to save them. ²³²I’ve had three months of it. ²³³I wouldn’t have three such months again if they let me loose in the treasury at Washington for it. ²³⁴I had to stay till I had it all, every man and every secret right here in this hand. ²³⁵I’d have waited a little longer if it hadn’t come to my knowledge that my secret was coming out. ²³⁶A letter had come into the town that would have set you wise to it all. ²³⁷Then I had to act and act quickly.

²³⁸“I’ve nothing more to say to you, except that when my time comes I’ll die the easier when I think of the work I have done in this valley. ²³⁹Now, Marvin, I’ll keep you no more. ²⁴⁰Take them in and get it over.”

²⁴¹There is little more to tell. ²⁴²Scanlan had been given a sealed note to be left at the address of Miss Ettie Shafter, a mission which he had accepted with a wink and a knowing smile. ²⁴³In the early hours of the morning a beautiful woman and a much muffled man boarded a special train which had been sent by the railroad company, and made a swift, unbroken journey out of the land of danger. ²⁴⁴It was the last time that ever either Ettie or her lover set foot in the Valley of Fear. ²⁴⁵Ten days later they were married in Chicago, with old Jacob Shafter as witness of the wedding.

²⁴⁶The trial of the Scowrers was held far from the place where their adherents might have terrified the guardians of the law. ²⁴⁷In vain they struggled. ²⁴⁸In vain the money of the lodge—money squeezed by blackmail out of the whole countryside—was spent like water in the attempt to save them. ²⁴⁹That cold, clear, unimpassioned statement from one who knew every detail of their lives, their organization, and their crimes was unshaken by all the wiles of their defenders. ²⁵⁰At last after so many years they were broken and scattered. ²⁵¹The cloud was lifted forever from the valley.

²⁵²McGinty met his fate upon the scaffold, cringing and whining when the last hour came. ²⁵³Eight of his chief followers shared his fate. ²⁵⁴Fifty-odd had various degrees of imprisonment. ²⁵⁵The work of Birdy Edwards was complete.

²⁵⁶And yet, as he had guessed, the game was not over yet. ²⁵⁷There was another hand to be played, and yet another and another. ²⁵⁸Ted Baldwin, for one, had escaped the scaffold; so had the Willabys; so had several others of the fiercest spirits of the gang. ²⁵⁹For ten years they were out of the world, and then came a day when they were free once more—a day which Edwards, who knew his men, was very sure would be an end of his life of peace. ²⁶⁰They had sworn an oath on all that they thought holy to have his blood as a vengeance for their comrades. ²⁶¹And well they strove to keep their vow!

²⁶²From Chicago he was chased, after two attempts so near success that it was sure that the third would get him. ²⁶³From Chicago he went under a changed name to California, and it was there that the light went for a time out of his life when Ettie Edwards died. ²⁶⁴Once again he was nearly killed, and once again under the name of Douglas he worked in a lonely canyon, where with an English partner named Barker he amassed a fortune. ²⁶⁵At last there came a warning to him that the bloodhounds were on his track once more, and he cleared—only just in time—for England. ²⁶⁶And thence came the John Douglas who for a second time married a worthy mate, and lived for five years as a Sussex county gentleman, a life which ended with the strange happenings of which we have heard.

Chapter XV.

Epilogue

¹The police trial had passed, in which the case of John Douglas was referred to a higher court. ²So had the Quarter Sessions, at which he was acquitted as having acted in self-defense.

³“Get him out of England at any cost,” wrote Holmes to the wife. ⁴“There are forces here which may be more dangerous than those he has escaped. ⁵There is no safety for your husband in England.”

⁶Two months had gone by, and the case had to some extent passed from our minds. ⁷Then one morning there came an enigmatic note slipped into our letter box. ⁸“Dear me, Mr. Holmes. ⁹Dear me!” said this singular epistle. ¹⁰There was neither superscription nor signature. ¹¹I laughed at the quaint message; but Holmes showed unwonted seriousness.

¹²“Deviltry, Watson!” he remarked, and sat long with a clouded brow.

¹³Late last night Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, brought up a message that a gentleman wished to see Holmes, and that the matter was of the utmost importance. ¹⁴Close at the heels of his messenger came Cecil Barker, our friend of the moated Manor House. ¹⁵His face was drawn and haggard.

¹⁶“I’ve had bad news—terrible news, Mr. Holmes,” said he.

¹⁷“I feared as much,” said Holmes.

¹⁸“You have not had a cable, have you?”

¹⁹“I have had a note from someone who has.”

²⁰“It’s poor Douglas. ²¹They tell me his name is Edwards; but he will always be Jack Douglas of Benito Canyon to me. ²²I told you that they started together for South Africa in the Palmyra three weeks ago.”

²³“Exactly.”

²⁴“The ship reached Cape Town last night. ²⁵I received this cable from Mrs. Douglas this morning:—

²⁶“Jack has been lost overboard in gale off St. Helena. ²⁷No one knows how accident occurred.

²⁸— “Ivy Douglas.”

²⁹“Ha! ³⁰It came like that, did it?” said Holmes, thoughtfully. ³¹“Well, I’ve no doubt it was well stage-managed.”

³²“You mean that you think there was no accident?”

³³“None in the world.”

³⁴“He was murdered?”

³⁵“Surely!”

³⁶“So I think also. ³⁷These infernal Scowrs, this cursed vindictive nest of criminals—”

³⁸“No, no, my good sir,” said Holmes. ³⁹“There is a master hand here. ⁴⁰It is no case of sawed-off shot-guns and clumsy six-shooters. ⁴¹You can tell an old master by the sweep of his brush. ⁴²I can tell a Moriarty when I see one. ⁴³This crime is from London, not from America.”

⁴⁴“But for what motive?”

⁴⁵“Because it is done by a man who cannot afford to fail—one whose whole unique position depends upon the fact that all he does must succeed. ⁴⁶A great brain and a huge organization have been turned to the extinction of one man. ⁴⁷It is crushing the nut with the hammer—an absurd extravagance of energy—but the nut is very effectually crushed all the same.”

⁴⁸“How came this man to have anything to do with it?”

⁴⁹“I can only say that the first word that ever came to us of the business was from one of his lieutenants. ⁵⁰These Americans were well advised. ⁵¹Having an English job to do, they took into partnership, as any foreign criminal could do, this great consultant in crime. ⁵²From that moment their man was doomed. ⁵³At first he would content himself by using his machinery in order to find their victim. ⁵⁴Then he would indicate how the matter might be treated. ⁵⁵Finally, when he read in the reports of the failure of this agent, he would step in himself with a master touch. ⁵⁶You heard me warn this man at Birlstone Manor House that the coming danger was greater than the past. ⁵⁷Was I right?”

⁵⁸Barker beat his head with his clenched fist in his impotent anger.

⁵⁹“Do you tell me that we have to sit down under this? ⁶⁰Do you say that no one can ever get level with this king-devil?”

⁶¹“No, I don't say that,” said Holmes, and his eyes seemed to be looking far into the future. ⁶²“I don't say that he can't be beat. ⁶³But you must give me time—you must give me time!”

⁶⁴We all sat in silence for some minutes, while those fateful eyes still strained to pierce the veil.

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

A Scandal in Bohemia

Chapter I.

¹To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. ²I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. ³In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. ⁴It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. ⁵All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. ⁶He 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. ⁷He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. ⁸They were admirable things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and actions. ⁹But 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. ¹⁰Grit 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. ¹¹And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

¹²I had seen little of Holmes lately. ¹³My marriage had drifted us away from each other. ¹⁴My 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. ¹⁵He 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. ¹⁶From 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. ¹⁷Beyond 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.

¹⁸One 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. ¹⁹As 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. ²⁰His 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. ²¹He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. ²²To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. ²³He was at work again. ²⁴He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem. ²⁵I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

²⁶His manner was not effusive. ²⁷It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. ²⁸With 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. ²⁹Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

³⁰“Wedlock suits you,” he remarked. ³¹“I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you.”

³²“Seven!” I answered.

³³“Indeed, I should have thought a little more. ³⁴Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. ³⁵And in practice again, I observe. ³⁶You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness.”

³⁷“Then, how do you know?”

³⁸“I see it, I deduce it. ³⁹How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?”

⁴⁰“My dear Holmes,” said I, “this is too much. ⁴¹You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. ⁴²It 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. ⁴³As 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.”

⁴⁴He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

⁴⁵“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. ⁴⁶Obviously 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. ⁴⁷Hence, 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. ⁴⁸As 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.”

⁴⁹I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. ⁵⁰“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. ⁵¹And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours.”

⁵²“Quite so,” he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. ⁵³“You see, but you do not observe. ⁵⁴The distinction is clear. ⁵⁵For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

⁵⁶“Frequently.”

⁵⁷“How often?”

⁵⁸“Well, some hundreds of times.”

⁵⁹“Then how many are there?”

⁶⁰“How many? ⁶¹I don't know.”

⁶²“Quite so! ⁶³You have not observed. ⁶⁴And yet you have seen. ⁶⁵That is just my point. ⁶⁶Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed. ⁶⁷By-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.” ⁶⁸He threw over a sheet of thick, pink-tinted note-paper which had been lying open upon the table. ⁶⁹“It came by the last post,” said he. ⁷⁰“Read it aloud.”

⁷¹The note was undated, and without either signature or address.

⁷²“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. ⁷³Your 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. ⁷⁴This account of you we have from all quarters received. ⁷⁵Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask.”

⁷⁶“This is indeed a mystery,” I remarked. ⁷⁷“What do you imagine that it means?”

⁷⁸“I have no data yet. ⁷⁹It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. ⁸⁰Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. ⁸¹But the note itself. ⁸²What do you deduce from it?”

⁸³I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written.

⁸⁴“The man who wrote it was presumably well to do,” I remarked, endeavouring to imitate my companion's processes. ⁸⁵“Such paper could not be bought under half a crown a packet. ⁸⁶It is peculiarly strong and stiff.”

⁸⁷“Peculiar—that is the very word,” said Holmes. ⁸⁸“It is not an English paper at all. ⁸⁹Hold it up to the light.”

⁹⁰I 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.

⁹¹“What do you make of that?” asked Holmes.

⁹²“The name of the maker, no doubt; or his monogram, rather.”

⁹³“Not at all. ⁹⁴The ‘G’ with the small ‘t’ stands for ‘Gesellschaft,’ which is the German for ‘Company.’ ⁹⁵It is a customary contraction like our ‘Co.’ ⁹⁶‘P,’ of course, stands for ‘Papier.’ ⁹⁷Now for the ‘Eg.’ Let us glance at our *Continental Gazetteer*.” ⁹⁸He took down a heavy brown volume from his shelves. ⁹⁹“Eglow, Eglonitz—here we are, Egria. ¹⁰⁰It is in a German-speaking country—in Bohemia, not far from Carlsbad. ¹⁰¹Remarkable as being the scene of the death of Wallenstein, and for its numerous glass-factories and paper-mills.’ ¹⁰²Ha, ha, my boy, what do you make of that?” ¹⁰³His eyes sparkled, and he sent up a great blue triumphant cloud from his cigarette.

¹⁰⁴“The paper was made in Bohemia,” I said.

¹⁰⁵“Precisely. ¹⁰⁶And the man who wrote the note is a German. ¹⁰⁷Do you note the peculiar construction of the sentence— ¹⁰⁸‘This account of you we have from all quarters received.’ ¹⁰⁹A Frenchman or Russian could not have written that. ¹¹⁰It is the German who is so uncourteous to his verbs. ¹¹¹It 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. ¹¹²And here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to resolve all our doubts.”

¹¹³As he spoke there was the sharp sound of horses' hoofs and grating wheels against the curb, followed by a sharp pull at the bell. ¹¹⁴Holmes whistled.

¹¹⁵“A pair, by the sound,” said he. ¹¹⁶“Yes,” he continued, glancing out of the window. ¹¹⁷“A nice little brougham and a pair of beauties. ¹¹⁸A hundred and fifty guineas apiece. ¹¹⁹There's money in this case, Watson, if there is nothing else.”

¹²⁰“I think that I had better go, Holmes.”

¹²¹“Not a bit, Doctor. ¹²²Stay where you are. ¹²³I am lost without my Boswell. ¹²⁴And this promises to be interesting. ¹²⁵It would be a pity to miss it.”

¹²⁶“But your client—”

¹²⁷“Never mind him. ¹²⁸I may want your help, and so may he. ¹²⁹Here he comes. ¹³⁰Sit down in that armchair, Doctor, and give us your best attention.”

¹³¹A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and in the passage, paused immediately outside the door. ¹³²Then there was a loud and authoritative tap.

¹³³“Come in!” said Holmes.

¹³⁴A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six inches in height, with the chest and limbs of a Hercules. ¹³⁵His dress was rich with a richness which would, in England, be looked upon as akin to bad taste. ¹³⁶Heavy 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. ¹³⁷Boots 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. ¹³⁸He 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. ¹³⁹From 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.

¹⁴⁰“You had my note?” he asked with a deep harsh voice and a strongly marked German accent. ¹⁴¹“I told you that I would call.” ¹⁴²He looked from one to the other of us, as if uncertain which to address.

¹⁴³“Pray take a seat,” said Holmes. ¹⁴⁴“This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, who is occasionally good enough to help me in my cases. ¹⁴⁵Whom have I the honour to address?”

¹⁴⁶“You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman. ¹⁴⁷I 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. ¹⁴⁸If not, I should much prefer to communicate with you alone.”

¹⁴⁹I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me back into my chair. ¹⁵⁰“It is both, or none,” said he. ¹⁵¹“You may say before this gentleman anything which you may say to me.”

¹⁵²The Count shrugged his broad shoulders. ¹⁵³“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. ¹⁵⁴At present it is not too much to say that it is of such weight it may have an influence upon European history.”

¹⁵⁵“I promise,” said Holmes.

¹⁵⁶“And I.”

¹⁵⁷“You will excuse this mask,” continued our strange visitor. ¹⁵⁸“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.”

¹⁵⁹“I was aware of it,” said Holmes dryly.

¹⁶⁰“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. ¹⁶¹To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House of Ormstein, hereditary kings of Bohemia.”

¹⁶²“I was also aware of that,” murmured Holmes, settling himself down in his armchair and closing his eyes.

¹⁶³Our 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.

¹⁶⁴Holmes slowly reopened his eyes and looked impatiently at his gigantic client.

¹⁶⁵“If your Majesty would condescend to state your case,” he remarked, “I should be better able to advise you.”

¹⁶⁶The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. ¹⁶⁷Then, with a gesture of desperation, he tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground. ¹⁶⁸“You are right,” he cried; “I am the King. ¹⁶⁹Why should I attempt to conceal it?”

¹⁷⁰“Why, indeed?” murmured Holmes. ¹⁷¹“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.”

¹⁷²“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. ¹⁷³Yet the matter was so delicate that I could not confide it to an agent without putting myself in his power. ¹⁷⁴I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting you.”

¹⁷⁵“Then, pray consult,” said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

¹⁷⁶“The facts are briefly these: ¹⁷⁷Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. ¹⁷⁸The name is no doubt familiar to you.”

¹⁷⁹“Kindly look her up in my index, Doctor,” murmured Holmes without opening his eyes. ¹⁸⁰For 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. ¹⁸¹In 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.

¹⁸²“Let me see!” said Holmes. ¹⁸³“Hum! ¹⁸⁴Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. ¹⁸⁵Contralto—hum! ¹⁸⁶La Scala, hum! ¹⁸⁷Prima donna Imperial Opera of Warsaw—yes! ¹⁸⁸Retired from operatic stage—ha! ¹⁸⁹Living in London—quite so! ¹⁹⁰Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled with this young person, wrote her some compromising letters, and is now desirous of getting those letters back.”

¹⁹¹“Precisely so. ¹⁹²But how—”

¹⁹³“Was there a secret marriage?”

¹⁹⁴“None.”

¹⁹⁵“No legal papers or certificates?”

¹⁹⁶“None.”

¹⁹⁷“Then I fail to follow your Majesty. ¹⁹⁸If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?”

¹⁹⁹“There is the writing.”

²⁰⁰“Pooh, pooh! ²⁰¹Forgery.”

²⁰²“My private note-paper.”

²⁰³“Stolen.”

²⁰⁴“My own seal.”

²⁰⁵“Imitated.”

²⁰⁶“My photograph.”

²⁰⁷“Bought.”

²⁰⁸“We were both in the photograph.”

²⁰⁹“Oh, dear! ²¹⁰That is very bad! ²¹¹Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion.”

²¹²“I was mad—insane.”

²¹³“You have compromised yourself seriously.”

²¹⁴“I was only Crown Prince then. ²¹⁵I was young. ²¹⁶I am but thirty now.”

²¹⁷“It must be recovered.”

²¹⁸“We have tried and failed.”

²¹⁹“Your Majesty must pay. ²²⁰It must be bought.”

²²¹“She will not sell.”

²²²“Stolen, then.”

²²³“Five attempts have been made. ²²⁴Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her house. ²²⁵Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. ²²⁶Twice she has been waylaid. ²²⁷There has been no result.”

²²⁸“No sign of it?”

²²⁹“Absolutely none.”

²³⁰Holmes laughed. ²³¹“It is quite a pretty little problem,” said he.

²³²“But a very serious one to me,” returned the King reproachfully.

²³³“Very, indeed. ²³⁴And what does she propose to do with the photograph?”

²³⁵“To ruin me.”

²³⁶“But how?”

²³⁷“I am about to be married.”

²³⁸“So I have heard.”

²³⁹“To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia. ²⁴⁰You may know the strict principles of her family. ²⁴¹She is herself the very soul of delicacy. ²⁴²A shadow of a doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end.”

²⁴³“And Irene Adler?”

²⁴⁴“Threatens to send them the photograph. ²⁴⁵And she will do it. ²⁴⁶I know that she will do it. ²⁴⁷You do not know her, but she has a soul of steel. ²⁴⁸She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men. ²⁴⁹Rather than I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go—none.”

²⁵⁰“You are sure that she has not sent it yet?”

²⁵¹“I am sure.”

²⁵²“And why?”

²⁵³“Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the betrothal was publicly proclaimed.

²⁵⁴That will be next Monday.”

²⁵⁵“Oh, then we have three days yet,” said Holmes with a yawn. ²⁵⁶“That is very fortunate, as I have one or two matters of importance to look into just at present. ²⁵⁷Your Majesty will, of course, stay in London for the present?”

²⁵⁸“Certainly. ²⁵⁹You will find me at the Langham under the name of the Count Von Kramm.”

²⁶⁰“Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress.”

²⁶¹“Pray do so. ²⁶²I shall be all anxiety.”

²⁶³“Then, as to money?”

²⁶⁴“You have carte blanche.”

²⁶⁵“Absolutely?”

²⁶⁶“I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph.”

²⁶⁷“And for present expenses?”

²⁶⁸The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak and laid it on the table.

²⁶⁹“There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes,” he said.

²⁷⁰Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and handed it to him.

²⁷¹“And Mademoiselle's address?” he asked.

²⁷²“Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood.”

²⁷³Holmes took a note of it. ²⁷⁴“One other question,” said he. ²⁷⁵“Was the photograph a cabinet?”

²⁷⁶“It was.”

²⁷⁷“Then, good-night, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon have some good news for you. ²⁷⁸And good-night, Watson,” he added, as the wheels of the royal brougham rolled down the street. ²⁷⁹“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.”

Chapter II.

¹At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned. ²The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning. ³I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be. ⁴I 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. ⁵Indeed, 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. ⁶So accustomed was I to his invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter into my head.

⁷It 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. ⁸Accustomed 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. ⁹With a nod he vanished into the bedroom, whence he emerged in five minutes tweed-suited and respectable, as of old. ¹⁰Putting his hands into his pockets, he stretched out his legs in front of the fire and laughed heartily for some minutes.

¹¹"Well, really!" he cried, and then he choked and laughed again until he was obliged to lie back, limp and helpless, in the chair.

¹²"What is it?"

¹³"It's quite too funny. ¹⁴I am sure you could never guess how I employed my morning, or what I ended by doing."

¹⁵"I can't imagine. ¹⁶I suppose that you have been watching the habits, and perhaps the house, of Miss Irene Adler."

¹⁷"Quite so; but the sequel was rather unusual. ¹⁸I will tell you, however. ¹⁹I left the house a little after eight o'clock this morning in the character of a groom out of work. ²⁰There is a wonderful sympathy and freemasonry among horsey men. ²¹Be one of them, and you will know all that there is to know. ²²I soon found Briony Lodge. ²³It is a bijou villa, with a garden at the back, but built out in front right up to the road, two stories. ²⁴Chubb lock to the door. ²⁵Large 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. ²⁶Behind there was nothing remarkable, save that the passage window could be reached from the top of the coach-house. ²⁷I walked round it and examined it closely from every point of view, but without noting anything else of interest.

²⁸"I then lounged 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. ²⁹I 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."

³⁰"And what of Irene Adler?" I asked.

³¹"Oh, she has turned all the men's heads down in that part. ³²She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. ³³So say the Serpentine-mews, to a man. ³⁴She lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day, and returns at seven sharp for dinner. ³⁵Seldom goes out at other times, except when

she sings. ³⁶Has only one male visitor, but a good deal of him. ³⁷He is dark, handsome, and dashing, never calls less than once a day, and often twice. ³⁸He is a Mr. Godfrey Norton, of the Inner Temple. ³⁹See the advantages of a cabman as a confidant. ⁴⁰They had driven him home a dozen times from Serpentine-mews, and knew all about him. ⁴¹When 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.

⁴²“This Godfrey Norton was evidently an important factor in the matter. ⁴³He was a lawyer. ⁴⁴That sounded ominous. ⁴⁵What was the relation between them, and what the object of his repeated visits? ⁴⁶Was she his client, his friend, or his mistress? ⁴⁷If the former, she had probably transferred the photograph to his keeping. ⁴⁸If the latter, it was less likely. ⁴⁹On 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. ⁵⁰It was a delicate point, and it widened the field of my inquiry. ⁵¹I 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.”

⁵²“I am following you closely,” I answered.

⁵³“I was still balancing the matter in my mind when a hansom cab drove up to Briony Lodge, and a gentleman sprang out. ⁵⁴He was a remarkably handsome man, dark, aquiline, and moustached—evidently the man of whom I had heard. ⁵⁵He 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.

⁵⁶“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. ⁵⁷Of her I could see nothing. ⁵⁸Presently he emerged, looking even more flurried than before. ⁵⁹As 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. ⁶⁰Half a guinea if you do it in twenty minutes!’

⁶¹“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. ⁶²It hadn't pulled up before she shot out of the hall door and into it. ⁶³I only caught a glimpse of her at the moment, but she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.

⁶⁴“‘The Church of St. Monica, John,’ she cried, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’

⁶⁵“This was quite too good to lose, Watson. ⁶⁶I was just balancing whether I should run for it, or whether I should perch behind her landau when a cab came through the street. ⁶⁷The driver looked twice at such a shabby fare, but I jumped in before he could object. ⁶⁸‘The Church of St. Monica,’ said I, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’ ⁶⁹It was twenty-five minutes to twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind.

⁷⁰“My cabby drove fast. ⁷¹I don't think I ever drove faster, but the others were there before us. ⁷²The cab and the landau with their steaming horses were in front of the door when I arrived. ⁷³I paid the man and hurried into the church. ⁷⁴There was not a soul there save the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who seemed to be expostulating with them. ⁷⁵They were all three standing in a knot in front of the altar. ⁷⁶I lounged up the side aisle like any other idler who has dropped into a church. ⁷⁷Suddenly, to my surprise, the three at the altar faced round to me, and Godfrey Norton came running as hard as he could towards me.

⁷⁸“‘Thank God,’ he cried. ⁷⁹‘You'll do. Come! Come!’

⁸⁰“‘What then?’ I asked.

⁸¹“Come, man, come, only three minutes, or it won't be legal.’

⁸²“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. ⁸³It 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. ⁸⁴It 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. ⁸⁵It 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. ⁸⁶The bride gave me a sovereign, and I mean to wear it on my watch-chain in memory of the occasion.”

⁸⁷“This is a very unexpected turn of affairs,” said I; “and what then?”

⁸⁸“Well, I found my plans very seriously menaced. ⁸⁹It looked as if the pair might take an immediate departure, and so necessitate very prompt and energetic measures on my part. ⁹⁰At the church door, however, they separated, he driving back to the Temple, and she to her own house. ⁹¹‘I shall drive out in the park at five as usual,’ she said as she left him. ⁹²I heard no more. ⁹³They drove away in different directions, and I went off to make my own arrangements.”

⁹⁴“Which are?”

⁹⁵“Some cold beef and a glass of beer,” he answered, ringing the bell. ⁹⁶“I have been too busy to think of food, and I am likely to be busier still this evening. ⁹⁷By the way, Doctor, I shall want your co-operation.”

⁹⁸“I shall be delighted.”

⁹⁹“You don't mind breaking the law?”

¹⁰⁰“Not in the least.”

¹⁰¹“Nor running a chance of arrest?”

¹⁰²“Not in a good cause.”

¹⁰³“Oh, the cause is excellent!”

¹⁰⁴“Then I am your man.”

¹⁰⁵“I was sure that I might rely on you.”

¹⁰⁶“But what is it you wish?”

¹⁰⁷“When Mrs. Turner has brought in the tray I will make it clear to you. ¹⁰⁸Now,” 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. ¹⁰⁹It is nearly five now. ¹¹⁰In two hours we must be on the scene of action. ¹¹¹Miss Irene, or Madame, rather, returns from her drive at seven. ¹¹²We must be at Briony Lodge to meet her.”

¹¹³“And what then?”

¹¹⁴“You must leave that to me. ¹¹⁵I have already arranged what is to occur. ¹¹⁶There is only one point on which I must insist. ¹¹⁷You must not interfere, come what may. ¹¹⁸You understand?”

¹¹⁹“I am to be neutral?”

¹²⁰“To do nothing whatever. ¹²¹There will probably be some small unpleasantness. ¹²²Do not join in it. ¹²³It will end in my being conveyed into the house. ¹²⁴Four or five minutes afterwards the sitting-room window will open. ¹²⁵You are to station yourself close to that open window.”

¹²⁶“Yes.”

¹²⁷“You are to watch me, for I will be visible to you.”

¹²⁸“Yes.”

¹²⁹“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. ¹³⁰You quite follow me?”

¹³¹“Entirely.”

¹³²“It is nothing very formidable,” he said, taking a long cigar-shaped roll from his pocket. ¹³³“It is an ordinary plumber's smoke-rocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting. ¹³⁴Your task is confined to that. ¹³⁵When you raise your cry of fire, it will be taken up by quite a number of people. ¹³⁶You may then walk to the end of the street, and I will rejoin you in ten minutes. ¹³⁷I hope that I have made myself clear?”

¹³⁸“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.”

¹³⁹“Precisely.”

¹⁴⁰“Then you may entirely rely on me.”

¹⁴¹“That is excellent. ¹⁴²I think, perhaps, it is almost time that I prepare for the new role I have to play.”

¹⁴³He disappeared into his bedroom and returned in a few minutes in the character of an amiable and simple-minded Nonconformist clergyman. ¹⁴⁴His 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. ¹⁴⁵It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume. ¹⁴⁶His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed. ¹⁴⁷The stage lost a fine actor, even as science lost an acute reasoner, when he became a specialist in crime.

¹⁴⁸It 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. ¹⁴⁹It 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. ¹⁵⁰The 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. ¹⁵¹On the contrary, for a small street in a quiet neighbourhood, it was remarkably animated. ¹⁵²There 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.

¹⁵³“You see,” remarked Holmes, as we paced to and fro in front of the house, “this marriage rather simplifies matters. ¹⁵⁴The photograph becomes a double-edged weapon now. ¹⁵⁵The 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. ¹⁵⁶Now the question is—Where are we to find the photograph?”

¹⁵⁷“Where, indeed?”

¹⁵⁸“It is most unlikely that she carries it about with her. ¹⁵⁹It is cabinet size. ¹⁶⁰Too large for easy concealment about a woman's dress. ¹⁶¹She knows that the King is capable of having her waylaid and searched. ¹⁶²Two attempts of the sort have already been made. ¹⁶³We may take it, then, that she does not carry it about with her.”

¹⁶⁴“Where, then?”

¹⁶⁵“Her banker or her lawyer. ¹⁶⁶There is that double possibility. ¹⁶⁷But I am inclined to think neither. ¹⁶⁸Women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting. ¹⁶⁹Why should she hand it over to anyone else? ¹⁷⁰She could trust her own guardianship, but she could not tell what indirect or political influence might be brought to bear upon a business man. ¹⁷¹Besides, remember that she had resolved to use it within a few days. ¹⁷²It must be where she can lay her hands upon it. ¹⁷³It must be in her own house.”

¹⁷⁴“But it has twice been burgled.”

¹⁷⁵“Pshaw! ¹⁷⁶They did not know how to look.”

¹⁷⁷“But how will you look?”

¹⁷⁸“I will not look.”

¹⁷⁹“What then?”

¹⁸⁰“I will get her to show me.”

¹⁸¹“But she will refuse.”

¹⁸²“She will not be able to. ¹⁸³But I hear the rumble of wheels. ¹⁸⁴It is her carriage. ¹⁸⁵Now carry out my orders to the letter.”

¹⁸⁶As he spoke the gleam of the side-lights of a carriage came round the curve of the avenue. ¹⁸⁷It was a smart little landau which rattled up to the door of Briony Lodge. ¹⁸⁸As 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. ¹⁸⁹A 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. ¹⁹⁰A 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. ¹⁹¹Holmes 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. ¹⁹²At 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. ¹⁹³Irene 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.

¹⁹⁴“Is the poor gentleman much hurt?” she asked.

¹⁹⁵“He is dead,” cried several voices.

¹⁹⁶“No, no, there's life in him!” shouted another. ¹⁹⁷“But he'll be gone before you can get him to hospital.”

¹⁹⁸“He's a brave fellow,” said a woman. ¹⁹⁹“They would have had the lady's purse and watch if it hadn't been for him. ²⁰⁰They were a gang, and a rough one, too. ²⁰¹Ah, he's breathing now.”

²⁰²“He can't lie in the street. ²⁰³May we bring him in, marm?”

²⁰⁴“Surely. ²⁰⁵Bring him into the sitting-room. ²⁰⁶There is a comfortable sofa. ²⁰⁷This way, please!”

²⁰⁸Slowly 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. ²⁰⁹The lamps had been lit, but the blinds had not been drawn, so that I could see Holmes as he lay upon the couch. ²¹⁰I 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. ²¹¹And yet it would be the blackest treachery to Holmes to draw back now from the part which he had intrusted to me. ²¹²I hardened my heart, and took the smoke-rocket from under my ulster. ²¹³After all, I thought, we are not injuring her. ²¹⁴We are but preventing her from injuring another.

²¹⁵Holmes had sat up upon the couch, and I saw him motion like a man who is in need of air. ²¹⁶A maid rushed across and threw open the window. ²¹⁷At 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!" ²¹⁸The 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!" ²¹⁹Thick clouds of smoke curled through the room and out at the open window. ²²⁰I caught a glimpse of rushing figures, and a moment later the voice of Holmes from within assuring them that it was a false alarm. ²²¹Slipping 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. ²²²He 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.

²²³"You did it very nicely, Doctor," he remarked. ²²⁴"Nothing could have been better. ²²⁵It is all right."

²²⁶"You have the photograph?"

²²⁷"I know where it is."

²²⁸"And how did you find out?"

²²⁹"She showed me, as I told you she would."

²³⁰"I am still in the dark."

²³¹"I do not wish to make a mystery," said he, laughing. ²³²"The matter was perfectly simple. ²³³You, of course, saw that everyone in the street was an accomplice. ²³⁴They were all engaged for the evening."

²³⁵"I guessed as much."

²³⁶"Then, when the row broke out, I had a little moist red paint in the palm of my hand. ²³⁷I rushed forward, fell down, clapped my hand to my face, and became a piteous spectacle. ²³⁸It is an old trick."

²³⁹"That also I could fathom."

²⁴⁰"Then they carried me in. ²⁴¹She was bound to have me in. ²⁴²What else could she do? ²⁴³And into her sitting-room, which was the very room which I suspected. ²⁴⁴It lay between that and her bedroom, and I was determined to see which. ²⁴⁵They laid me on a couch, I motioned for air, they were compelled to open the window, and you had your chance."

²⁴⁶"How did that help you?"

²⁴⁷"It was all-important. ²⁴⁸When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. ²⁴⁹It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it. ²⁵⁰In the case of the Darlington substitution scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsworth Castle business. ²⁵¹A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. ²⁵²Now 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. ²⁵³She would rush to secure it. ²⁵⁴The alarm of fire was admirably done. ²⁵⁵The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. ²⁵⁶She responded beautifully. ²⁵⁷The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. ²⁵⁸She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half-drew it out. ²⁵⁹When 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. ²⁶⁰I rose, and, making my excuses, escaped from the house. ²⁶¹I 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. ²⁶²A little over-precipitance may ruin all."

²⁶³"And now?" I asked.

²⁶⁴"Our quest is practically finished. ²⁶⁵I shall call with the King to-morrow, and with you, if you care to come with us. ²⁶⁶We 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. ²⁶⁷It might be a satisfaction to his Majesty to regain it with his own hands."

²⁶⁸"And when will you call?"

²⁶⁹"At eight in the morning. ²⁷⁰She will not be up, so that we shall have a clear field. ²⁷¹Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage may mean a complete change in her life and habits. ²⁷²I must wire to the King without delay."

²⁷³We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. ²⁷⁴He was searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said:

²⁷⁵"Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

²⁷⁶There 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.

²⁷⁷"I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. ²⁷⁸"Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been."

Chapter III.

¹I 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.

²“You have really got it!” he cried, grasping Sherlock Holmes by either shoulder and looking eagerly into his face.

³“Not yet.”

⁴“But you have hopes?”

⁵“I have hopes.”

⁶“Then, come. ⁷I am all impatience to be gone.”

⁸“We must have a cab.”

⁹“No, my brougham is waiting.”

¹⁰“Then that will simplify matters.” ¹¹We descended and started off once more for Briony Lodge.

¹²“Irene Adler is married,” remarked Holmes.

¹³“Married! ¹⁴When?”

¹⁵“Yesterday.”

¹⁶“But to whom?”

¹⁷“To an English lawyer named Norton.”

¹⁸“But she could not love him.”

¹⁹“I am in hopes that she does.”

²⁰“And why in hopes?”

²¹“Because it would spare your Majesty all fear of future annoyance. ²²If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your Majesty. ²³If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason why she should interfere with your Majesty's plan.”

²⁴“It is true. ²⁵And yet—Well! ²⁶I wish she had been of my own station! ²⁷What a queen she would have made!” ²⁸He relapsed into a moody silence, which was not broken until we drew up in Serpentine Avenue.

²⁹The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood upon the steps. ³⁰She watched us with a sardonic eye as we stepped from the brougham.

³¹“Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?” said she.

³²“I am Mr. Holmes,” answered my companion, looking at her with a questioning and rather startled gaze.

³³“Indeed! ³⁴My mistress told me that you were likely to call. ³⁵She left this morning with her husband by the 5.15 train from Charing Cross for the Continent.”

³⁶“What!” Sherlock Holmes staggered back, white with chagrin and surprise. ³⁷“Do you mean that she has left England?”

³⁸“Never to return.”

³⁹“And the papers?” asked the King hoarsely. ⁴⁰“All is lost.”

⁴¹“We shall see.” ⁴²He pushed past the servant and rushed into the drawing-room, followed by the King and myself. ⁴³The furniture was scattered about in every direction, with dismantled shelves and open drawers, as if the lady had hurriedly ransacked them before her flight. ⁴⁴Holmes rushed at the bell-pull, tore back a small sliding shutter, and, plunging in his hand, pulled out a photograph and a letter. ⁴⁵The photograph was of Irene Adler herself in evening dress, the letter was superscribed to “Sherlock Holmes, Esq. To be left till called for.” ⁴⁶My friend tore it open and we all three read it together. ⁴⁷It was dated at midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:

⁴⁸“My dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes:

⁴⁹“You really did it very well. ⁵⁰You took me in completely. ⁵¹Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion. ⁵²But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. ⁵³I had been warned against you months ago. ⁵⁴I had been told that if the King employed an agent it would certainly be you. ⁵⁵And your address had been given me. ⁵⁶Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know. ⁵⁷Even after I became suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind old clergyman. ⁵⁸But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. ⁵⁹Male costume is nothing new to me. ⁶⁰I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. ⁶¹I 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.

⁶²“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. ⁶³Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Temple to see my husband.

⁶⁴“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. ⁶⁵As to the photograph, your client may rest in peace. ⁶⁶I love and am loved by a better man than he. ⁶⁷The King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged. ⁶⁸I 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. ⁶⁹I leave a photograph which he might care to possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,

⁷⁰“Very truly yours,

⁷¹“Irene Norton, née Adler.”

⁷²“What a woman—oh, what a woman!” cried the King of Bohemia, when we had all three read this epistle. ⁷³“Did I not tell you how quick and resolute she was? ⁷⁴Would she not have made an admirable queen? ⁷⁵Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?”

⁷⁶“From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty,” said Holmes coldly. ⁷⁷“I am sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty’s business to a more successful conclusion.”

⁷⁸“On the contrary, my dear sir,” cried the King; “nothing could be more successful. ⁷⁹I know that her word is inviolate. ⁸⁰The photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire.”

⁸¹“I am glad to hear your Majesty say so.”

⁸²“I am immensely indebted to you. ⁸³Pray tell me in what way I can reward you. ⁸⁴This ring—” ⁸⁵He slipped an emerald snake ring from his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.

⁸⁶“Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly,” said Holmes.

⁸⁷“You have but to name it.”

⁸⁸“This photograph!”

⁸⁹The King stared at him in amazement.

⁹⁰“Irene's photograph!” he cried. ⁹¹“Certainly, if you wish it.”

⁹²“I thank your Majesty. ⁹³Then there is no more to be done in the matter. ⁹⁴I have the honour to wish you a very good-morning.” ⁹⁵He 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.

⁹⁶And 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. ⁹⁷He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. ⁹⁸And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of the woman.

The Red-Headed League

¹I 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. ²With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door behind me.

³“You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson,” he said cordially.

⁴“I was afraid that you were engaged.”

⁵“So I am. ⁶Very much so.”

⁷“Then I can wait in the next room.”

⁸“Not at all. ⁹This 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.”

¹⁰The 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.

¹¹“Try the settee,” said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair and putting his fingertips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. ¹²“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. ¹³You 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.”

¹⁴“Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me,” I observed.

¹⁵“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.”

¹⁶“A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting.”

¹⁷“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. ¹⁸Now, 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. ¹⁹You 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. ²⁰As 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. ²¹Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to recommence your narrative. ²²I 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. ²³As 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. ²⁴In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique.”

²⁵The 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. ²⁶As 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.

²⁷I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. ²⁸Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. ²⁹He 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. ³⁰A frayed top-hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. ³¹Altogether, 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.

³²Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances. ³³"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."

³⁴Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

³⁵"How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. ³⁶"How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour. ³⁷It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter."

³⁸"Your hands, my dear sir. ³⁹Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. ⁴⁰You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed."

⁴¹"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

⁴²"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."

⁴³"Ah, of course, I forgot that. ⁴⁴But the writing?"

⁴⁵"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?"

⁴⁶"Well, but China?"

⁴⁷"The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. ⁴⁸I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. ⁴⁹That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. ⁵⁰When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."

⁵¹Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. ⁵²"Well, I never!" said he. ⁵³"I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it, after all."

⁵⁴"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake in explaining. ⁵⁵'Omne ignotum pro magnifico,' you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. ⁵⁶Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?"

⁵⁷"Yes, I have got it now," he answered with his thick red finger planted halfway down the column. ⁵⁸"Here it is. ⁵⁹This is what began it all. ⁶⁰You just read it for yourself, sir."

⁶¹I took the paper from him and read as follows:

⁶²"To the Red-headed League: ⁶³On 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 a week for purely nominal services. ⁶⁴All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind

and above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible. ⁶⁵Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

⁶⁶"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

⁶⁷Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. ⁶⁸"It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. ⁶⁹"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. ⁷⁰You will first make a note, Doctor, of the paper and the date."

⁷¹"It is The Morning Chronicle of April 27, 1890. ⁷²Just two months ago."

⁷³"Very good. ⁷⁴Now, Mr. Wilson?"

⁷⁵"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. ⁷⁶It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. ⁷⁷I 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."

⁷⁸"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

⁷⁹"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth, either. ⁸⁰It's hard to say his age. ⁸¹I 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. ⁸²But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

⁸³"Why, indeed? ⁸⁴You seem most fortunate in having an employee who comes under the full market price. ⁸⁵It is not a common experience among employers in this age. ⁸⁶I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

⁸⁷"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. ⁸⁸"Never was such a fellow for photography. ⁸⁹Snapping 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. ⁹⁰That is his main fault, but on the whole he's a good worker. ⁹¹There's no vice in him."

⁹²"He is still with you, I presume?"

⁹³"Yes, sir. ⁹⁴He 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. ⁹⁵We 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.

⁹⁶"The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. ⁹⁷Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

⁹⁸"'I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'

⁹⁹"'Why that?' I asks.

¹⁰⁰"'Why,' says he, 'here's another vacancy on the League of the Red-headed Men. ¹⁰¹It'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. ¹⁰²If my hair would only change colour, here's a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.'

¹⁰³"'Why, what is it, then?' I asked. ¹⁰⁴You 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. ¹⁰⁵In that way I didn't know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

¹⁰⁶“Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men?’ he asked with his eyes open.

¹⁰⁷“Never.’

¹⁰⁸“Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.’

¹⁰⁹“And what are they worth?’ I asked.

¹¹⁰“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.’

¹¹¹“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.

¹¹²“Tell me all about it,’ said I.

¹¹³“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. ¹¹⁴As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. ¹¹⁵He 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. ¹¹⁶From all I hear it is splendid pay and very little to do.’

¹¹⁷“But,’ said I, ‘there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.’

¹¹⁸“Not so many as you might think,’ he answered. ¹¹⁹“You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. ¹²⁰This American had started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. ¹²¹Then, 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. ¹²²Now, 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.’

¹²³“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. ¹²⁴Vincent 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. ¹²⁵He 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.

¹²⁶“I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. ¹²⁷From 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. ¹²⁸Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope's Court looked like a coster's orange barrow. ¹²⁹I should not have thought there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. ¹³⁰Every 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. ¹³¹When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it. ¹³²How 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. ¹³³There 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.”

¹³⁴“Your experience has been a most entertaining one,” remarked Holmes as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. ¹³⁵“Pray continue your very interesting statement.”

¹³⁶“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. ¹³⁷He 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. ¹³⁸Getting a vacancy did not seem to be such a very easy matter, after all. ¹³⁹However, 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.

¹⁴⁰“This is Mr. Jabez Wilson,” said my assistant, “and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the League.”

¹⁴¹“And he is admirably suited for it,” the other answered. ¹⁴²“He has every requirement. ¹⁴³I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.” ¹⁴⁴He took a step backward, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. ¹⁴⁵Then suddenly he plunged forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my success.

¹⁴⁶“It would be injustice to hesitate,” said he. ¹⁴⁷“You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.” ¹⁴⁸With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I yelled with the pain. ¹⁴⁹“There is water in your eyes,” said he as he released me. ¹⁵⁰“I perceive that all is as it should be. ¹⁵¹But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint. ¹⁵²I could tell you tales of cobbler's wax which would disgust you with human nature.” ¹⁵³He stepped over to the window and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the vacancy was filled. ¹⁵⁴A 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.

¹⁵⁵“My name,” said he, “is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. ¹⁵⁶Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? ¹⁵⁷Have you a family?”

¹⁵⁸“I answered that I had not.

¹⁵⁹“His face fell immediately.

¹⁶⁰“Dear me!” he said gravely, “that is very serious indeed! ¹⁶¹I am sorry to hear you say that. ¹⁶²The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their maintenance. ¹⁶³It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.”

¹⁶⁴“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.

¹⁶⁵“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. ¹⁶⁶When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?”

¹⁶⁷“Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,” said I.

¹⁶⁸“Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!” said Vincent Spaulding. ¹⁶⁹“I should be able to look after that for you.”

¹⁷⁰“What would be the hours?” I asked.

¹⁷¹“Ten to two.”

¹⁷²“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. ¹⁷³Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

¹⁷⁴“That would suit me very well,’ said I. ¹⁷⁵‘And the pay?’

¹⁷⁶“Is £4 a week.’

¹⁷⁷“And the work?’

¹⁷⁸“Is purely nominal.’

¹⁷⁹“What do you call purely nominal?’

¹⁸⁰“Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. ¹⁸¹If you leave, you forfeit your whole position forever. ¹⁸²The will is very clear upon that point. ¹⁸³You don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.’

¹⁸⁴“It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,’ said I.

¹⁸⁵“No excuse will avail,’ said Mr. Duncan Ross; ‘neither sickness nor business nor anything else.

¹⁸⁶There you must stay, or you lose your billet.’

¹⁸⁷“And the work?’

¹⁸⁸“Is to copy out the “Encyclopaedia Britannica.” ¹⁸⁹There is the first volume of it in that press. ¹⁹⁰You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. ¹⁹¹Will you be ready to-morrow?’

¹⁹²“Certainly,’ I answered.

¹⁹³“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.’ ¹⁹⁴He 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.

¹⁹⁵“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. ¹⁹⁶It 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.’ ¹⁹⁷Vincent Spaulding did what he could to cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the whole thing. ¹⁹⁸However, 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.

¹⁹⁹“Well, to my surprise and delight, everything was as right as possible. ²⁰⁰The table was set out ready for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross was there to see that I got fairly to work. ²⁰¹He 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. ²⁰²At 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.

²⁰³“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. ²⁰⁴It was the same next week, and the same the week after. ²⁰⁵Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. ²⁰⁶By 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. ²⁰⁷Still, 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.

²⁰⁸“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. ²⁰⁹It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly filled a shelf with my writings. ²¹⁰And then suddenly the whole business came to an end.”

²¹¹“To an end?”

²¹²“Yes, sir. ²¹³And no later than this morning. ²¹⁴I 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. ²¹⁵Here it is, and you can read for yourself.”

²¹⁶He held up a piece of white cardboard about the size of a sheet of note-paper. ²¹⁷It read in this fashion:

²¹⁸The Red-headed League

is

Dissolved

²¹⁹October 9, 1890.

²²⁰Sherlock 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.

²²¹“I cannot see that there is anything very funny,” cried our client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming head. ²²²“If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere.”

²²³“No, no,” cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from which he had half risen. ²²⁴“I really wouldn't miss your case for the world. ²²⁵It is most refreshingly unusual. ²²⁶But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. ²²⁷Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?”

²²⁸“I was staggered, sir. ²²⁹I did not know what to do. ²³⁰Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. ²³¹Finally, 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. ²³²He said that he had never heard of any such body. ²³³Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan Ross was. ²³⁴He answered that the name was new to him.

²³⁵“‘Well,’ said I, ‘the gentleman at No. 4.’

²³⁶“‘What, the red-headed man?’

²³⁷“‘Yes.’

²³⁸“‘Oh,’ said he, ‘his name was William Morris. ²³⁹He was a solicitor and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. ²⁴⁰He moved out yesterday.’

²⁴¹“‘Where could I find him?’

²⁴²“‘Oh, at his new offices. ²⁴³He did tell me the address. ²⁴⁴Yes, 17 King Edward Street, near St. Paul's.’

²⁴⁵“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.”

²⁴⁶“And what did you do then?” asked Holmes.

²⁴⁷“I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my assistant. ²⁴⁸But he could not help me in any way. ²⁴⁹He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. ²⁵⁰But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. ²⁵¹I 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.”

²⁵²“And you did very wisely,” said Holmes. ²⁵³“Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. ²⁵⁴From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear.”

²⁵⁵“Grave enough!” said Mr. Jabez Wilson. ²⁵⁶“Why, I have lost four pound a week.”

²⁵⁷“As far as you are personally concerned,” remarked Holmes, “I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. ²⁵⁸On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some £30, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. ²⁵⁹You have lost nothing by them.”

²⁶⁰“No, sir. ²⁶¹But 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. ²⁶²It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two and thirty pounds.”

²⁶³“We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you. ²⁶⁴And, first, one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. ²⁶⁵This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement—how long had he been with you?”

²⁶⁶“About a month then.”

²⁶⁷“How did he come?”

²⁶⁸“In answer to an advertisement.”

²⁶⁹“Was he the only applicant?”

²⁷⁰“No, I had a dozen.”

²⁷¹“Why did you pick him?”

²⁷²“Because he was handy and would come cheap.”

²⁷³“At half-wages, in fact.”

²⁷⁴“Yes.”

²⁷⁵“What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?”

²⁷⁶“Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. ²⁷⁷Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead.”

²⁷⁸Holmes sat up in his chair in considerable excitement. ²⁷⁹“I thought as much,” said he. ²⁸⁰“Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?”

²⁸¹“Yes, sir. ²⁸²He told me that a gipsy had done it for him when he was a lad.”

²⁸³“Hum!” said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. ²⁸⁴“He is still with you?”

²⁸⁵“Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him.”

²⁸⁶“And has your business been attended to in your absence?”

²⁸⁷“Nothing to complain of, sir. ²⁸⁸There's never very much to do of a morning.”

²⁸⁹“That will do, Mr. Wilson. ²⁹⁰I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. ²⁹¹To-day is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion.”

²⁹²“Well, Watson,” said Holmes when our visitor had left us, “what do you make of it all?”

²⁹³“I make nothing of it,” I answered frankly. ²⁹⁴“It is a most mysterious business.”

²⁹⁵“As a rule,” said Holmes, “the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. ²⁹⁶It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify. ²⁹⁷But I must be prompt over this matter.”

²⁹⁸“What are you going to do, then?” I asked.

²⁹⁹“To smoke,” he answered. ³⁰⁰“It is quite a three pipe problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes.” ³⁰¹He 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. ³⁰²I 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.

³⁰³“Sarasate plays at the St. James's Hall this afternoon,” he remarked. ³⁰⁴“What do you think, Watson? ³⁰⁵Could your patients spare you for a few hours?”

³⁰⁶“I have nothing to do to-day. ³⁰⁷My practice is never very absorbing.”

³⁰⁸“Then put on your hat and come. ³⁰⁹I am going through the City first, and we can have some lunch on the way. ³¹⁰I observe that there is a good deal of German music on the programme, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. ³¹¹It is introspective, and I want to introspect. ³¹²Come along!”

³²³We 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. ³²⁴It 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. ³²⁵Three 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. ³²⁶Sherlock 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. ³²⁷Then he walked slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. ³²⁸Finally 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. ³²⁹It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

³³⁰“Thank you,” said Holmes, “I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand.”

³³¹“Third right, fourth left,” answered the assistant promptly, closing the door.

³³²“Smart fellow, that,” observed Holmes as we walked away. ³³³“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. ³³⁴I have known something of him before.”

³³⁵“Evidently,” said I, “Mr. Wilson's assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. ³³⁶I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him.”

³³⁷“Not him.”

³³⁸“What then?”

³³⁹“The knees of his trousers.”

³⁴⁰“And what did you see?”

³⁴¹“What I expected to see.”

³⁴²“Why did you beat the pavement?”

³⁴³“My dear doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. ³⁴⁴We are spies in an enemy's country. ³⁴⁵We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. ³⁴⁶Let us now explore the parts which lie behind it.”

³⁴⁷The 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. ³⁴⁸It was one of the main arteries which conveyed the traffic of the City to the north and west. ³⁴⁹The 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. ³⁵⁰It 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.

³⁵¹“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. ³⁵²It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. ³⁵³There 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. ³⁵⁴That carries us right on to the other block. ³⁵⁵And now, Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. ³⁵⁶A 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.”

³⁵⁷My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit. ³⁵⁸All 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. ³⁵⁹In 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. ³⁶⁰The 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. ³⁶¹Then 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. ³⁶²When 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.

³⁶³“You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor,” he remarked as we emerged.

³⁶⁴“Yes, it would be as well.”

³⁶⁵“And I have some business to do which will take some hours. ³⁶⁶This business at Coburg Square is serious.”

³⁶⁷“Why serious?”

³⁶⁸“A considerable crime is in contemplation. ³⁶⁹I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. ³⁷⁰But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. ³⁷¹I shall want your help to-night.”

³⁷²“At what time?”

³⁷³“Ten will be early enough.”

³⁷⁴“I shall be at Baker Street at ten.”

³⁷⁵“Very well. ³⁷⁶And, I say, Doctor, there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket.” ³⁷⁷He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

³⁷⁸I 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. ³⁷⁹Here 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. ³⁸⁰As 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. ³⁸¹What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed? ³⁸²Where were we going, and what were we to do? ³⁸³I had the hint from Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker's assistant was a formidable man—a man who might play a deep game. ³⁸⁴I tried to puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair and set the matter aside until night should bring an explanation.

³⁸⁵It 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. ³⁸⁶Two hansoms were standing at the door, and as I entered the passage I heard the sound of voices from above. ³⁸⁷On 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.

³⁸⁸“Ha! ³⁸⁹Our party is complete,” said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack. ³⁹⁰“Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? ³⁹¹Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in to-night's adventure.”

³⁹²“We're hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see,” said Jones in his consequential way. ³⁹³“Our friend here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. ³⁹⁴All he wants is an old dog to help him to do the running down.”

³⁹⁵“I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase,” observed Mr. Merryweather gloomily.

³⁹⁶“You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir,” said the police agent loftily. ³⁹⁷“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. ³⁹⁸It 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.”

³⁹⁹“Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right,” said the stranger with deference. ⁴⁰⁰“Still, I confess that I miss my rubber. ⁴⁰¹It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber.”

⁴⁰²“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. ⁴⁰³For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some £30,000; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands.”

⁴⁰⁴“John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. ⁴⁰⁵He'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. ⁴⁰⁶He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. ⁴⁰⁷His grandfather was a royal duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. ⁴⁰⁸His 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. ⁴⁰⁹He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. ⁴¹⁰I've been on his track for years and have never set eyes on him yet.”

⁴¹¹“I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night. ⁴¹²I'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. ⁴¹³It is past ten, however, and quite time that we started. ⁴¹⁴If you two will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the second.”

⁴¹⁵Sherlock 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. ⁴¹⁶We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets until we emerged into Farrington Street.

⁴¹⁷“We are close there now,” my friend remarked. ⁴¹⁸“This fellow Merryweather is a bank director, and personally interested in the matter. ⁴¹⁹I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. ⁴²⁰He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. ⁴²¹He has one positive virtue. ⁴²²He is as brave as a bulldog and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. ⁴²³Here we are, and they are waiting for us.”

⁴²⁴We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had found ourselves in the morning. ⁴²⁵Our 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. ⁴²⁶Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. ⁴²⁷This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. ⁴²⁸Mr. 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.

⁴²⁹“You are not very vulnerable from above,” Holmes remarked as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

⁴³⁰“Nor from below,” said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor.

⁴³¹“Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!” he remarked, looking up in surprise.

⁴³²“I must really ask you to be a little more quiet!” said Holmes severely. ⁴³³“You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. ⁴³⁴Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?”

⁴³⁵The 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. ⁴³⁶A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again and put his glass in his pocket.

⁴³⁷“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. ⁴³⁸Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. ⁴³⁹We are at present, Doctor—as no doubt you have divined—in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. ⁴⁴⁰Mr. 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.”

⁴⁴¹“It is our French gold,” whispered the director. ⁴⁴²“We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it.”

⁴⁴³“Your French gold?”

⁴⁴⁴“Yes. ⁴⁴⁵We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources and borrowed for that purpose 30,000 napoleons from the Bank of France. ⁴⁴⁶It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. ⁴⁴⁷The crate upon which I sit contains 2,000 napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. ⁴⁴⁸Our 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.”

⁴⁴⁹“Which were very well justified,” observed Holmes. ⁴⁵⁰“And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. ⁴⁵¹I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. ⁴⁵²In the meantime Mr. Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern.”

⁴⁵³“And sit in the dark?”

⁴⁵⁴“I am afraid so. ⁴⁵⁵I 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. ⁴⁵⁶But I see that the enemy's preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. ⁴⁵⁷And, first of all, we must choose our positions. ⁴⁵⁸These are daring men, and though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm unless we are careful. ⁴⁵⁹I shall stand behind this crate, and do you conceal yourselves behind those. ⁴⁶⁰Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. ⁴⁶¹If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down.”

⁴⁶²I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. ⁴⁶³Holmes 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. ⁴⁶⁴The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment's notice. ⁴⁶⁵To 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.

⁴⁶⁶“They have but one retreat,” whispered Holmes. ⁴⁶⁷“That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. ⁴⁶⁸I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?”

⁴⁶⁹“I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door.”

⁴⁷⁰“Then we have stopped all the holes. ⁴⁷¹And now we must be silent and wait.”

⁴⁷²What a time it seemed! ⁴⁷³From 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. ⁴⁷⁴My 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. ⁴⁷⁵From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. ⁴⁷⁶Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

⁴⁷⁷At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. ⁴⁷⁸Then 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. ⁴⁷⁹For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. ⁴⁸⁰Then 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.

⁴⁸¹Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. ⁴⁸²With 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. ⁴⁸³Over 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. ⁴⁸⁴In 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.

⁴⁸⁵“It's all clear,” he whispered. ⁴⁸⁶“Have you the chisel and the bags? ⁴⁸⁷Great Scott! ⁴⁸⁸Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!”

⁴⁸⁹Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. ⁴⁹⁰The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. ⁴⁹¹The 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.

⁴⁹²“It's no use, John Clay,” said Holmes blandly. ⁴⁹³“You have no chance at all.”

⁴⁹⁴“So I see,” the other answered with the utmost coolness. ⁴⁹⁵“I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails.”

⁴⁹⁶“There are three men waiting for him at the door,” said Holmes.

⁴⁹⁷“Oh, indeed! ⁴⁹⁸You seem to have done the thing very completely. ⁴⁹⁹I must compliment you.”

⁵⁰⁰“And I you,” Holmes answered. ⁵⁰¹“Your red-headed idea was very new and effective.”

⁵⁰²“You'll see your pal again presently,” said Jones. ⁵⁰³“He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. ⁵⁰⁴Just hold out while I fix the derbies.”

⁵⁰⁵“I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands,” remarked our prisoner as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists. ⁵⁰⁶“You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. ⁵⁰⁷Have the goodness, also, when you address me always to say ‘sir’ and ‘please.’”

⁵⁰⁸“All right,” said Jones with a stare and a snigger. ⁵⁰⁹“Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your Highness to the police-station?”

⁵¹⁰“That is better,” said John Clay serenely. ⁵¹¹He made a sweeping bow to the three of us and walked quietly off in the custody of the detective.

⁵¹²“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. ⁵¹³There 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.”

⁵¹⁴“I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay,” said Holmes. ⁵¹⁵“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.”

⁵¹⁶“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. ⁵¹⁷It was a curious way of managing it, but, really, it would be difficult to suggest a better. ⁵¹⁸The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the colour of his accomplice's hair. ⁵¹⁹The £4 a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? ⁵²⁰They 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. ⁵²¹From 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.”

⁵²²“But how could you guess what the motive was?”

⁵²³“Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. ⁵²⁴That, however, was out of the question. ⁵²⁵The 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. ⁵²⁶It must, then, be something out of the house. ⁵²⁷What could it be? ⁵²⁸I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. ⁵²⁹The cellar! ⁵³⁰There was the end of this tangled clue. ⁵³¹Then 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. ⁵³²He was doing something in the cellar—something which took many hours a day for months on end. ⁵³³What could it be, once more? ⁵³⁴I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

⁵³⁵“So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. ⁵³⁶I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. ⁵³⁷I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. ⁵³⁸It was not in front. ⁵³⁹Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. ⁵⁴⁰We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. ⁵⁴¹I hardly looked at his face. ⁵⁴²His knees were what I wished to see. ⁵⁴³You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. ⁵⁴⁴They spoke of those hours of burrowing. ⁵⁴⁵The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. ⁵⁴⁶I walked round the corner, saw the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem. ⁵⁴⁷When 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.”

⁵⁴⁸“And how could you tell that they would make their attempt to-night?” I asked.

⁵⁴⁹“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. ⁵⁵⁰But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. ⁵⁵¹Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. ⁵⁵²For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night.”

⁵⁵³“You reasoned it out beautifully,” I exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. ⁵⁵⁴“It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true.”

⁵⁵⁵“It saved me from ennui,” he answered, yawning. ⁵⁵⁶“Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. ⁵⁵⁷My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. ⁵⁵⁸These little problems help me to do so.”

⁵⁵⁹“And you are a benefactor of the race,” said I.

⁵⁶⁰He shrugged his shoulders. ⁵⁶¹“Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use,” he remarked.

⁵⁶²“‘L'homme c'est rien—l'oeuvre c'est tout,’ as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand.”

A Case of Identity

¹“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. ²We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. ³If 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.”

⁴“And yet I am not convinced of it,” I answered. ⁵“The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough, and vulgar enough. ⁶We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic.”

⁷“A certain selection and discretion must be used in producing a realistic effect,” remarked Holmes.

⁸“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.

⁹Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace.”

¹⁰I smiled and shook my head. ¹¹“I can quite understand your thinking so.” I said. ¹²“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. ¹³But here”—I picked up the morning paper from the ground—“let us put it to a practical test. ¹⁴Here is the first heading upon which I come. ¹⁵‘A husband’s cruelty to his wife.’ ¹⁶There is half a column of print, but I know without reading it that it is all perfectly familiar to me. ¹⁷There is, of course, the other woman, the drink, the push, the blow, the bruise, the sympathetic sister or landlady. ¹⁸The crudest of writers could invent nothing more crude.”

¹⁹“Indeed, your example is an unfortunate one for your argument,” said Holmes, taking the paper and glancing his eye down it. ²⁰“This is the Dundas separation case, and, as it happens, I was engaged in clearing up some small points in connection with it. ²¹The 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. ²²Take a pinch of snuff, Doctor, and acknowledge that I have scored over you in your example.”

²³He held out his snuffbox of old gold, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid. ²⁴Its splendour was in such contrast to his homely ways and simple life that I could not help commenting upon it.

²⁵“Ah,” said he, “I forgot that I had not seen you for some weeks. ²⁶It is a little souvenir from the King of Bohemia in return for my assistance in the case of the Irene Adler papers.”

²⁷“And the ring?” I asked, glancing at a remarkable brilliant which sparkled upon his finger.

²⁸“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.”

²⁹“And have you any on hand just now?” I asked with interest.

³⁰“Some ten or twelve, but none which present any feature of interest. ³¹They are important, you understand, without being interesting. ³²Indeed, 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. ³³The larger crimes are apt to be the simpler, for the bigger the crime the more obvious, as a rule, is the motive. ³⁴In 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. ³⁵It 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.”

³⁶He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted blinds gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street. ³⁷Looking 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. ³⁸From 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. ³⁹Suddenly, 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.

⁴⁰“I have seen those symptoms before,” said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. ⁴¹“Oscillation upon the pavement always means an *affaire de coeur*. ⁴²She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. ⁴³And yet even here we may discriminate. ⁴⁴When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. ⁴⁵Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved. ⁴⁶But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts.”

⁴⁷As 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. ⁴⁸Sherlock 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.

⁴⁹“Do you not find,” he said, “that with your short sight it is a little trying to do so much typewriting?”

⁵⁰“I did at first,” she answered, “but now I know where the letters are without looking.” ⁵¹Then, 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. ⁵²“You’ve heard about me, Mr. Holmes,” she cried, “else how could you know all that?”

⁵³“Never mind,” said Holmes, laughing; “it is my business to know things. ⁵⁴Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others overlook. ⁵⁵If not, why should you come to consult me?”

⁵⁶“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. ⁵⁷Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as much for me. ⁵⁸I’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.”

⁵⁹“Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?” asked Sherlock Holmes, with his fingertips together and his eyes to the ceiling.

⁶⁰Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss Mary Sutherland. ⁶¹“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. ⁶²He 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.”

⁶³“Your father,” said Holmes, “your stepfather, surely, since the name is different.”

⁶⁴“Yes, my stepfather. ⁶⁵I call him father, though it sounds funny, too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself.”

⁶⁶“And your mother is alive?”

⁶⁷“Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. ⁶⁸I 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. ⁶⁹Father 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. ⁷⁰They got £4700 for the goodwill and interest, which wasn't near as much as father could have got if he had been alive.”

⁷¹I 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.

⁷²“Your own little income,” he asked, “does it come out of the business?”

⁷³“Oh, no, sir. ⁷⁴It is quite separate and was left me by my uncle Ned in Auckland. ⁷⁵It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4½ per cent. ⁷⁶Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can only touch the interest.”

⁷⁷“You interest me extremely,” said Holmes. ⁷⁸“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. ⁷⁹I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely upon an income of about £60.”

⁸⁰“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. ⁸¹Of course, that is only just for the time. ⁸²Mr. 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. ⁸³It brings me twopence a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day.”

⁸⁴“You have made your position very clear to me,” said Holmes. ⁸⁵“This is my friend, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. ⁸⁶Kindly tell us now all about your connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

⁸⁷A flush stole over Miss Sutherland's face, and she picked nervously at the fringe of her jacket. ⁸⁸“I met him first at the gasfitters' ball,” she said. ⁸⁹“They used to send father tickets when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and sent them to mother. ⁹⁰Mr. Windibank did not wish us to go. ⁹¹He never did wish us to go anywhere. ⁹²He would get quite mad if I wanted so much as to join a Sunday-school treat. ⁹³But this time I was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to prevent? ⁹⁴He said the folk were not fit for us to know, when all father's friends were to be there. ⁹⁵And 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. ⁹⁶At 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.”

⁹⁷“I suppose,” said Holmes, “that when Mr. Windibank came back from France he was very annoyed at your having gone to the ball.”

⁹⁸“Oh, well, he was very good about it. ⁹⁹He laughed, I remember, and shrugged his shoulders, and said there was no use denying anything to a woman, for she would have her way.”

¹⁰⁰“I see. ¹⁰¹Then at the gasfitters' ball you met, as I understand, a gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

¹⁰²“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.”

¹⁰³“No?”

¹⁰⁴“Well, you know father didn't like anything of the sort. ¹⁰⁵He 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. ¹⁰⁶But then, as I used to say to mother, a woman wants her own circle to begin with, and I had not got mine yet.”

¹⁰⁷“But how about Mr. Hosmer Angel? ¹⁰⁸Did he make no attempt to see you?”

¹⁰⁹“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. ¹¹⁰We could write in the meantime, and he used to write every day. ¹¹¹I took the letters in in the morning, so there was no need for father to know.”

¹¹²“Were you engaged to the gentleman at this time?”

¹¹³“Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. ¹¹⁴We were engaged after the first walk that we took. ¹¹⁵Hosmer—Mr. Angel—was a cashier in an office in Leadenhall Street—and—”

¹¹⁶“What office?”

¹¹⁷“That's the worst of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know.”

¹¹⁸“Where did he live, then?”

¹¹⁹“He slept on the premises.”

¹²⁰“And you don't know his address?”

¹²¹“No—except that it was Leadenhall Street.”

¹²²“Where did you address your letters, then?”

¹²³“To the Leadenhall Street Post Office, to be left till called for. ¹²⁴He 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. ¹²⁵That will just show you how fond he was of me, Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think of.”

¹²⁶“It was most suggestive,” said Holmes. ¹²⁷“It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important. ¹²⁸Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer Angel?”

¹²⁹“He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. ¹³⁰He would rather walk with me in the evening than in the daylight, for he said that he hated to be conspicuous. ¹³¹Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. ¹³²Even his voice was gentle. ¹³³He'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. ¹³⁴He 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.”

¹³⁵“Well, and what happened when Mr. Windibank, your stepfather, returned to France?”

¹³⁶“Mr. Hosmer Angel came to the house again and proposed that we should marry before father came back. ¹³⁷He was in dreadful earnest and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would always be true to him. ¹³⁸Mother said he was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion. ¹³⁹Mother was all in his favour from the first and was even fonder of him

than I was. ¹⁴⁰Then, 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. ¹⁴¹I didn't quite like that, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁴²It 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."

¹⁴³"It missed him, then?"

¹⁴⁴"Yes, sir; for he had started to England just before it arrived."

¹⁴⁵"Ha! that was unfortunate. ¹⁴⁶Your wedding was arranged, then, for the Friday. ¹⁴⁷Was it to be in church?"

¹⁴⁸"Yes, sir, but very quietly. ¹⁴⁹It 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. ¹⁵⁰We 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! ¹⁵¹The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. ¹⁵²That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him."

¹⁵³"It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated," said Holmes.

¹⁵⁴"Oh, no, sir! ¹⁵⁵He was too good and kind to leave me so. ¹⁵⁶Why, 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. ¹⁵⁷It seemed strange talk for a wedding-morning, but what has happened since gives a meaning to it."

¹⁵⁸"Most certainly it does. ¹⁵⁹Your own opinion is, then, that some unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?"

¹⁶⁰"Yes, sir. ¹⁶¹I believe that he foresaw some danger, or else he would not have talked so. ¹⁶²And then I think that what he foresaw happened."

¹⁶³"But you have no notion as to what it could have been?"

¹⁶⁴"None."

¹⁶⁵"One more question. ¹⁶⁶How did your mother take the matter?"

¹⁶⁷"She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter again."

¹⁶⁸"And your father? ¹⁶⁹Did you tell him?"

¹⁷⁰"Yes; and he seemed to think, with me, that something had happened, and that I should hear of Hosmer again. ¹⁷¹As he said, what interest could anyone have in bringing me to the doors of the church, and then leaving me? ¹⁷²Now, 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. ¹⁷³And yet, what could have happened? ¹⁷⁴And why could he not write? ¹⁷⁵Oh, it drives me half-mad to think of it, and I can't sleep a wink at night." ¹⁷⁶She pulled a little handkerchief out of her muff and began to sob heavily into it.

¹⁷⁷"I shall glance into the case for you," said Holmes, rising, "and I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. ¹⁷⁸Let the weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind dwell

upon it further. ¹⁷⁹Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel vanish from your memory, as he has done from your life.”

¹⁸⁰“Then you don't think I'll see him again?”

¹⁸¹“I fear not.”

¹⁸²“Then what has happened to him?”

¹⁸³“You will leave that question in my hands. ¹⁸⁴I should like an accurate description of him and any letters of his which you can spare.”

¹⁸⁵“I advertised for him in last Saturday's Chronicle,” said she. ¹⁸⁶“Here is the slip and here are four letters from him.”

¹⁸⁷“Thank you. ¹⁸⁸And your address?”

¹⁸⁹“No. 31 Lyon Place, Camberwell.”

¹⁹⁰“Mr. Angel's address you never had, I understand. ¹⁹¹Where is your father's place of business?”

¹⁹²“He travels for Westhouse & Marbank, the great claret importers of Fenchurch Street.”

¹⁹³“Thank you. ¹⁹⁴You have made your statement very clearly. ¹⁹⁵You will leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given you. ¹⁹⁶Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it to affect your life.”

¹⁹⁷“You are very kind, Mr. Holmes, but I cannot do that. I shall be true to Hosmer. ¹⁹⁸He shall find me ready when he comes back.”

¹⁹⁹For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which compelled our respect. ²⁰⁰She laid her little bundle of papers upon the table and went her way, with a promise to come again whenever she might be summoned.

²⁰¹Sherlock 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. ²⁰²Then 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.

²⁰³“Quite an interesting study, that maiden,” he observed. ²⁰⁴“I found her more interesting than her little problem, which, by the way, is rather a trite one. ²⁰⁵You 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. ²⁰⁶Old as is the idea, however, there were one or two details which were new to me. ²⁰⁷But the maiden herself was most instructive.”

²⁰⁸“You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me,” I remarked.

²⁰⁹“Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. ²¹⁰You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. ²¹¹I 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. ²¹²Now, what did you gather from that woman's appearance? ²¹³Describe it.”

²¹⁴“Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. ²¹⁵Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. ²¹⁶Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. ²¹⁷Her gloves were greyish and were worn through at the right forefinger. ²¹⁸Her boots I didn't observe. ²¹⁹She

had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way.”

²²⁰Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly together and chuckled.

²²¹“Pon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. ²²²You have really done very well indeed. ²²³It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for colour. ²²⁴Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. ²²⁵My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. ²²⁶In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. ²²⁷As you observe, this woman had plush upon her sleeves, which is a most useful material for showing traces. ²²⁸The double line a little above the wrist, where the typewrist presses against the table, was beautifully defined. ²²⁹The 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. ²³⁰I 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.”

²³¹“It surprised me.”

²³²“But, surely, it was obvious. ²³³I 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. ²³⁴One was buttoned only in the two lower buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and fifth. ²³⁵Now, 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.”

²³⁶“And what else?” I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by my friend's incisive reasoning.

²³⁷“I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving home but after being fully dressed. ²³⁸You 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. ²³⁹She had written in a hurry and dipped her pen too deep. ²⁴⁰It must have been this morning, or the mark would not remain clear upon the finger. ²⁴¹All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back to business, Watson. ²⁴²Would you mind reading me the advertised description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?”

²⁴³I held the little printed slip to the light.

²⁴⁴“Missing,” it said, “on the morning of the fourteenth, a gentleman named Hosmer Angel. ²⁴⁵About 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. ²⁴⁶Was 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. ²⁴⁷Known to have been employed in an office in Leadenhall Street. ²⁴⁸Anybody bringing—”

²⁴⁹“That will do,” said Holmes. ²⁵⁰“As to the letters,” he continued, glancing over them, “they are very commonplace. ²⁵¹Absolutely no clue in them to Mr. Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. ²⁵²There is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike you.”

²⁵³“They are typewritten,” I remarked.

²⁵⁴“Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. ²⁵⁵Look at the neat little ‘Hosmer Angel’ at the bottom. ²⁵⁶There is a date, you see, but no superscription except Leadenhall Street, which is rather vague. ²⁵⁷The point about the signature is very suggestive—in fact, we may call it conclusive.”

²⁵⁸“Of what?”

²⁵⁹“My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it bears upon the case?”

²⁶⁰“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.”

²⁶¹“No, that was not the point. ²⁶²However, I shall write two letters, which should settle the matter.

²⁶³One 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. ²⁶⁴It is just as well that we should do business with the male relatives. ²⁶⁵And 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.”

²⁶⁶I 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. ²⁶⁷Once 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.

²⁶⁸I 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.

²⁶⁹A 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. ²⁷⁰It 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. ²⁷¹I found Sherlock Holmes alone, however, half asleep, with his long, thin form curled up in the recesses of his armchair. ²⁷²A 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.

²⁷³“Well, have you solved it?” I asked as I entered.

²⁷⁴“Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta.”

²⁷⁵“No, no, the mystery!” I cried.

²⁷⁶“Oh, that! ²⁷⁷I thought of the salt that I have been working upon. ²⁷⁸There was never any mystery in the matter, though, as I said yesterday, some of the details are of interest. ²⁷⁹The only drawback is that there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel.”

²⁸⁰“Who was he, then, and what was his object in deserting Miss Sutherland?”

²⁸¹The 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.

²⁸²“This is the girl's stepfather, Mr. James Windibank,” said Holmes. ²⁸³“He has written to me to say that he would be here at six. ²⁸⁴Come in!”

²⁸⁵The 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. ²⁸⁶He 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.

²⁸⁷“Good-evening, Mr. James Windibank,” said Holmes. ²⁸⁸“I think that this typewritten letter is from you, in which you made an appointment with me for six o'clock?”

²⁸⁹“Yes, sir. ²⁹⁰I am afraid that I am a little late, but I am not quite my own master, you know. ²⁹¹I 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. ²⁹²It 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. ²⁹³Of 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. ²⁹⁴Besides, it is a useless expense, for how could you possibly find this Hosmer Angel?”

²⁹⁵“On the contrary,” said Holmes quietly; “I have every reason to believe that I will succeed in discovering Mr. Hosmer Angel.”

²⁹⁶Mr. Windibank gave a violent start and dropped his gloves. ²⁹⁷“I am delighted to hear it,” he said.

²⁹⁸“It is a curious thing,” remarked Holmes, “that a typewriter has really quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting. ²⁹⁹Unless they are quite new, no two of them write exactly alike. ³⁰⁰Some letters get more worn than others, and some wear only on one side. ³⁰¹Now, 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.’ ³⁰²There are fourteen other characteristics, but those are the more obvious.”

³⁰³“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.

³⁰⁴“And now I will show you what is really a very interesting study, Mr. Windibank,” Holmes continued. ³⁰⁵“I think of writing another little monograph some of these days on the typewriter and its relation to crime. ³⁰⁶It is a subject to which I have devoted some little attention. ³⁰⁷I have here four letters which purport to come from the missing man. ³⁰⁸They are all typewritten. ³⁰⁹In 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.”

³¹⁰Mr. Windibank sprang out of his chair and picked up his hat. ³¹¹“I cannot waste time over this sort of fantastic talk, Mr. Holmes,” he said. ³¹²“If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know when you have done it.”

³¹³“Certainly,” said Holmes, stepping over and turning the key in the door. ³¹⁴“I let you know, then, that I have caught him!”

³¹⁵“What! where?” shouted Mr. Windibank, turning white to his lips and glancing about him like a rat in a trap.

³¹⁶“Oh, it won't do—really it won't,” said Holmes suavely. ³¹⁷“There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. ³¹⁸It 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. ³¹⁹That's right! ³²⁰Sit down and let us talk it over.”

³²¹Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a glitter of moisture on his brow. ³²²“It—it's not actionable,” he stammered.

³²³“I am very much afraid that it is not. ³²⁴But between ourselves, Windibank, it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me. ³²⁵Now, let me just run over the course of events, and you will contradict me if I go wrong.”

³²⁶The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is utterly crushed. ³²⁷Holmes 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.

³²⁸“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. ³²⁹It was a considerable sum, for

people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. ³³⁰It was worth an effort to preserve it. ³³¹The 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. ³³²Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? ³³³He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. ³³⁴But soon he found that that would not answer forever. ³³⁵She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. ³³⁶What does her clever stepfather do then? ³³⁷He conceives an idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. ³³⁸With 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."

³³⁹"It was only a joke at first," groaned our visitor. ³⁴⁰"We never thought that she would have been so carried away."

³⁴¹"Very likely not. ³⁴²However 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. ³⁴³She was flattered by the gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the loudly expressed admiration of her mother. ³⁴⁴Then 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. ³⁴⁵There were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the girl's affections from turning towards anyone else. ³⁴⁶But the deception could not be kept up forever. ³⁴⁷These pretended journeys to France were rather cumbrous. ³⁴⁸The 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. ³⁴⁹Hence 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. ³⁵⁰James 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. ³⁵¹As 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. ³⁵²I think that was the chain of events, Mr. Windibank!"

³⁵³Our 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.

³⁵⁴"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. ³⁵⁵I 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."

³⁵⁶"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. ³⁵⁷If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. ³⁵⁸By 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—" ³⁵⁹He 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.

³⁶⁰"There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!" said Holmes, laughing, as he threw himself down into his chair once more. ³⁶¹"That fellow will rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and ends on a gallows. ³⁶²The case has, in some respects, been not entirely devoid of interest."

³⁶³“I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning,” I remarked.

³⁶⁴“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. ³⁶⁵Then the fact that the two men were never together, but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was suggestive. ³⁶⁶So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice, which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. ³⁶⁷My 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. ³⁶⁸You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same direction.”

³⁶⁹“And how did you verify them?”

³⁷⁰“Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. ³⁷¹I knew the firm for which this man worked. ³⁷²Having 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. ³⁷³I 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. ³⁷⁴As I expected, his reply was typewritten and revealed the same trivial but characteristic defects. ³⁷⁵The 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 employee, James Windibank. ³⁷⁶Voilà tout!”

³⁷⁷“And Miss Sutherland?”

³⁷⁸“If I tell her she will not believe me. ³⁷⁹You 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.’ ³⁸⁰There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world.”

The Boscombe Valley Mystery

¹We were seated at breakfast one morning, my wife and I, when the maid brought in a telegram. ²It was from Sherlock Holmes and ran in this way:

³“Have you a couple of days to spare? ⁴Have just been wired for from the west of England in connection with Boscombe Valley tragedy. ⁵Shall be glad if you will come with me. ⁶Air and scenery perfect. ⁷Leave Paddington by the 11.15.”

⁸“What do you say, dear?” said my wife, looking across at me. ⁹“Will you go?”

¹⁰“I really don't know what to say. ¹¹I have a fairly long list at present.”

¹²“Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. ¹³You have been looking a little pale lately. ¹⁴I think that the change would do you good, and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes' cases.”

¹⁵“I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them,” I answered. ¹⁶“But if I am to go, I must pack at once, for I have only half an hour.”

¹⁷My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller. ¹⁸My 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. ¹⁹Sherlock 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.

²⁰“It is really very good of you to come, Watson,” said he. ²¹“It makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. ²²Local aid is always either worthless or else biassed. ²³If you will keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets.”

²⁴We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of papers which Holmes had brought with him. ²⁵Among these he rummaged and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until we were past Reading. ²⁶Then he suddenly rolled them all into a gigantic ball and tossed them up onto the rack.

²⁷“Have you heard anything of the case?” he asked.

²⁸“Not a word. ²⁹I have not seen a paper for some days.”

³⁰“The London press has not had very full accounts. ³¹I have just been looking through all the recent papers in order to master the particulars. ³²It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple cases which are so extremely difficult.”

³³“That sounds a little paradoxical.”

³⁴“But it is profoundly true. ³⁵Singularity is almost invariably a clue. ³⁶The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home. ³⁷In this case, however, they have established a very serious case against the son of the murdered man.”

³⁸“It is a murder, then?”

³⁹“Well, it is conjectured to be so. ⁴⁰I shall take nothing for granted until I have the opportunity of looking personally into it. ⁴¹I will explain the state of things to you, as far as I have been able to understand it, in a very few words.

⁴²“Boscombe Valley is a country district not very far from Ross, in Herefordshire. ⁴³The 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. ⁴⁴One of the farms which he held, that of Hatherley, was let to Mr. Charles McCarthy, who was also an ex-Australian. ⁴⁵The 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. ⁴⁶Turner 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. ⁴⁷McCarthy had one son, a lad of eighteen, and Turner had an only daughter of the same age, but neither of them had wives living. ⁴⁸They 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. ⁴⁹McCarthy kept two servants—a man and a girl. ⁵⁰Turner had a considerable household, some half-dozen at the least. ⁵¹That is as much as I have been able to gather about the families. ⁵²Now for the facts.

⁵³“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. ⁵⁴He 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. ⁵⁵From that appointment he never came back alive.

⁵⁶“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. ⁵⁷One was an old woman, whose name is not mentioned, and the other was William Crowder, a game-keeper in the employ of Mr. Turner. ⁵⁸Both these witnesses depose that Mr. McCarthy was walking alone. ⁵⁹The 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. ⁶⁰To the best of his belief, the father was actually in sight at the time, and the son was following him. ⁶¹He thought no more of the matter until he heard in the evening of the tragedy that had occurred.

⁶²“The two McCarthys were seen after the time when William Crowder, the game-keeper, lost sight of them. ⁶³The Boscombe Pool is thickly wooded round, with just a fringe of grass and of reeds round the edge. ⁶⁴A 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. ⁶⁵She 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. ⁶⁶She 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. ⁶⁷She 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. ⁶⁸She 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. ⁶⁹He was much excited, without either his gun or his hat, and his right hand and sleeve were observed to be stained with fresh blood. ⁷⁰On following him they found the dead body stretched out upon the grass beside the pool. ⁷¹The head had been beaten in by repeated blows of some heavy and blunt weapon. ⁷²The 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. ⁷³Under 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. ⁷⁴Those are the main facts of the case as they came out before the coroner and the police-court.”

⁷⁵“I could hardly imagine a more damning case,” I remarked. ⁷⁶“If ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal it does so here.”

⁷⁷“Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing,” answered Holmes thoughtfully. ⁷⁸“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. ⁷⁹It 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. ⁸⁰There 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. ⁸¹Lestrade, 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."

⁸²"I am afraid," said I, "that the facts are so obvious that you will find little credit to be gained out of this case."

⁸³"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact," he answered, laughing. ⁸⁴"Besides, we may chance to hit upon some other obvious facts which may have been by no means obvious to Mr. Lestrade. ⁸⁵You 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. ⁸⁶To 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."

⁸⁷"How on earth—"

⁸⁸"My dear fellow, I know you well. ⁸⁹I know the military neatness which characterises you. ⁹⁰You 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. ⁹¹I could not imagine a man of your habits looking at himself in an equal light and being satisfied with such a result. ⁹²I only quote this as a trivial example of observation and inference. ⁹³Therein lies my métier, and it is just possible that it may be of some service in the investigation which lies before us. ⁹⁴There are one or two minor points which were brought out in the inquest, and which are worth considering."

⁹⁵"What are they?"

⁹⁶"It appears that his arrest did not take place at once, but after the return to Hatherley Farm. ⁹⁷On 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. ⁹⁸This 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."

⁹⁹"It was a confession," I ejaculated.

¹⁰⁰"No, for it was followed by a protestation of innocence."

¹⁰¹"Coming on the top of such a damning series of events, it was at least a most suspicious remark."

¹⁰²"On the contrary," said Holmes, "it is the brightest rift which I can at present see in the clouds. ¹⁰³However innocent he might be, he could not be such an absolute imbecile as not to see that the circumstances were very black against him. ¹⁰⁴Had 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. ¹⁰⁵His frank acceptance of the situation marks him as either an innocent man, or else as a man of considerable self-restraint and firmness. ¹⁰⁶As 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. ¹⁰⁷The 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."

¹⁰⁸I shook my head. ¹⁰⁹"Many men have been hanged on far slighter evidence," I remarked.

¹¹⁰“So they have. And many men have been wrongfully hanged.”

¹¹¹“What is the young man's own account of the matter?”

¹¹²“It is, I am afraid, not very encouraging to his supporters, though there are one or two points in it which are suggestive. ¹¹³You will find it here, and may read it for yourself.”

¹¹⁴He 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. ¹¹⁵I settled myself down in the corner of the carriage and read it very carefully. ¹¹⁶It ran in this way:

¹¹⁷“Mr. James McCarthy, the only son of the deceased, was then called and gave evidence as follows: ¹¹⁸I had been away from home for three days at Bristol, and had only just returned upon the morning of last Monday, the 3rd. ¹¹⁹My 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. ¹²⁰Shortly 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. ¹²¹I 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. ¹²²On 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. ¹²³I had no idea that he was in front of me. ¹²⁴When about a hundred yards from the pool I heard a cry of “Cooee!” which was a usual signal between my father and myself. ¹²⁵I then hurried forward, and found him standing by the pool. ¹²⁶He appeared to be much surprised at seeing me and asked me rather roughly what I was doing there. ¹²⁷A conversation ensued which led to high words and almost to blows, for my father was a man of a very violent temper. ¹²⁸Seeing that his passion was becoming ungovernable, I left him and returned towards Hatherley Farm. ¹²⁹I had not gone more than 150 yards, however, when I heard a hideous outcry behind me, which caused me to run back again. ¹³⁰I found my father expiring upon the ground, with his head terribly injured. ¹³¹I dropped my gun and held him in my arms, but he almost instantly expired. ¹³²I 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. ¹³³I saw no one near my father when I returned, and I have no idea how he came by his injuries. ¹³⁴He was not a popular man, being somewhat cold and forbidding in his manners, but he had, as far as I know, no active enemies. ¹³⁵I know nothing further of the matter.’

¹³⁶“The Coroner: Did your father make any statement to you before he died?”

¹³⁷“Witness: He mumbled a few words, but I could only catch some allusion to a rat.

¹³⁸“The Coroner: What did you understand by that?”

¹³⁹“Witness: It conveyed no meaning to me. ¹⁴⁰I thought that he was delirious.

¹⁴¹“The Coroner: What was the point upon which you and your father had this final quarrel?”

¹⁴²“Witness: I should prefer not to answer.

¹⁴³“The Coroner: I am afraid that I must press it.

¹⁴⁴“Witness: It is really impossible for me to tell you. ¹⁴⁵I can assure you that it has nothing to do with the sad tragedy which followed.

¹⁴⁶“The Coroner: That is for the court to decide. ¹⁴⁷I need not point out to you that your refusal to answer will prejudice your case considerably in any future proceedings which may arise.

¹⁴⁸“Witness: I must still refuse.

¹⁴⁹“The Coroner: I understand that the cry of ‘Cooee’ was a common signal between you and your father?”

¹⁵⁰“Witness: It was.

¹⁵¹“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?”

¹⁵²“Witness (with considerable confusion): I do not know.

¹⁵³“A Juryman: Did you see nothing which aroused your suspicions when you returned on hearing the cry and found your father fatally injured?”

¹⁵⁴“Witness: Nothing definite.

¹⁵⁵“The Coroner: What do you mean?”

¹⁵⁶“Witness: I was so disturbed and excited as I rushed out into the open, that I could think of nothing except of my father. ¹⁵⁷Yet I have a vague impression that as I ran forward something lay upon the ground to the left of me. ¹⁵⁸It seemed to me to be something grey in colour, a coat of some sort, or a plaid perhaps. ¹⁵⁹When I rose from my father I looked round for it, but it was gone.

¹⁶⁰“Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?”

¹⁶¹““Yes, it was gone.’

¹⁶²““You cannot say what it was?’

¹⁶³““No, I had a feeling something was there.’

¹⁶⁴““How far from the body?’

¹⁶⁵““A dozen yards or so.’

¹⁶⁶““And how far from the edge of the wood?’

¹⁶⁷““About the same.’

¹⁶⁸““Then if it was removed it was while you were within a dozen yards of it?”

¹⁶⁹““Yes, but with my back towards it.’

¹⁷⁰“This concluded the examination of the witness.”

¹⁷¹“I see,” said I as I glanced down the column, “that the coroner in his concluding remarks was rather severe upon young McCarthy. ¹⁷²He 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. ¹⁷³They are all, as he remarks, very much against the son.”

¹⁷⁴Holmes laughed softly to himself and stretched himself out upon the cushioned seat. ¹⁷⁵“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. ¹⁷⁶Don't you see that you alternately give him credit for having too much imagination and too little? ¹⁷⁷Too 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. ¹⁷⁸No, 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. ¹⁷⁹And now here is my pocket Petrarch, and not another word shall I say of this case until we are on the scene of action. ¹⁸⁰We lunch at Swindon, and I see that we shall be there in twenty minutes.”

¹⁸¹It 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. ¹⁸²A lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking, was waiting for us upon the platform. ¹⁸³In 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. ¹⁸⁴With him we drove to the Hereford Arms where a room had already been engaged for us.

¹⁸⁵"I have ordered a carriage," said Lestrade as we sat over a cup of tea. ¹⁸⁶"I knew your energetic nature, and that you would not be happy until you had been on the scene of the crime."

¹⁸⁷"It was very nice and complimentary of you," Holmes answered. ¹⁸⁸"It is entirely a question of barometric pressure."

¹⁸⁹Lestrade looked startled. ¹⁹⁰"I do not quite follow," he said.

¹⁹¹"How is the glass? ¹⁹²Twenty-nine, I see. ¹⁹³No wind, and not a cloud in the sky. ¹⁹⁴I have a caseful of cigarettes here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country hotel abomination. ¹⁹⁵I do not think that it is probable that I shall use the carriage to-night."

¹⁹⁶Lestrade laughed indulgently. ¹⁹⁷"You have, no doubt, already formed your conclusions from the newspapers," he said. ¹⁹⁸"The case is as plain as a pikestaff, and the more one goes into it the plainer it becomes. ¹⁹⁹Still, of course, one can't refuse a lady, and such a very positive one, too. ²⁰⁰She 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. ²⁰¹Why, bless my soul! here is her carriage at the door."

²⁰²He had hardly spoken before there rushed into the room one of the most lovely young women that I have ever seen in my life. ²⁰³Her 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.

²⁰⁴"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. ²⁰⁵I have driven down to tell you so. ²⁰⁶I know that James didn't do it. ²⁰⁷I know it, and I want you to start upon your work knowing it, too. ²⁰⁸Never let yourself doubt upon that point. ²⁰⁹We 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. ²¹⁰Such a charge is absurd to anyone who really knows him."

²¹¹"I hope we may clear him, Miss Turner," said Sherlock Holmes. ²¹²"You may rely upon my doing all that I can."

²¹³"But you have read the evidence. ²¹⁴You have formed some conclusion? ²¹⁵Do you not see some loophole, some flaw? ²¹⁶Do you not yourself think that he is innocent?"

²¹⁷"I think that it is very probable."

²¹⁸"There, now!" she cried, throwing back her head and looking defiantly at Lestrade. ²¹⁹"You hear! ²²⁰He gives me hopes."

²²¹Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. ²²²"I am afraid that my colleague has been a little quick in forming his conclusions," he said.

²²³"But he is right. ²²⁴Oh! I know that he is right. ²²⁵James never did it. ²²⁶And 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."

²²⁷"In what way?" asked Holmes.

²²⁸“It is no time for me to hide anything. ²²⁹James and his father had many disagreements about me. ²³⁰Mr. McCarthy was very anxious that there should be a marriage between us. ²³¹James 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. ²³²So there were quarrels, and this, I am sure, was one of them.”

²³³“And your father?” asked Holmes. ²³⁴“Was he in favour of such a union?”

²³⁵“No, he was averse to it also. ²³⁶No one but Mr. McCarthy was in favour of it.” ²³⁷A quick blush passed over her fresh young face as Holmes shot one of his keen, questioning glances at her.

²³⁸“Thank you for this information,” said he. ²³⁹“May I see your father if I call to-morrow?”

²⁴⁰“I am afraid the doctor won't allow it.”

²⁴¹“The doctor?”

²⁴²“Yes, have you not heard? ²⁴³Poor father has never been strong for years back, but this has broken him down completely. ²⁴⁴He has taken to his bed, and Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck and that his nervous system is shattered. ²⁴⁵Mr. McCarthy was the only man alive who had known dad in the old days in Victoria.”

²⁴⁶“Ha! ²⁴⁷In Victoria! ²⁴⁸That is important.”

²⁴⁹“Yes, at the mines.”

²⁵⁰“Quite so; at the gold-mines, where, as I understand, Mr. Turner made his money.”

²⁵¹“Yes, certainly.”

²⁵²“Thank you, Miss Turner. ²⁵³You have been of material assistance to me.”

²⁵⁴“You will tell me if you have any news to-morrow. ²⁵⁵No doubt you will go to the prison to see James.

²⁵⁶“Oh, if you do, Mr. Holmes, do tell him that I know him to be innocent.”

²⁵⁷“I will, Miss Turner.”

²⁵⁸“I must go home now, for dad is very ill, and he misses me so if I leave him. ²⁵⁹Good-bye, and God help you in your undertaking.” ²⁶⁰She hurried from the room as impulsively as she had entered, and we heard the wheels of her carriage rattle off down the street.

²⁶¹“I am ashamed of you, Holmes,” said Lestrade with dignity after a few minutes' silence. ²⁶²“Why should you raise up hopes which you are bound to disappoint? ²⁶³I am not over-tender of heart, but I call it cruel.”

²⁶⁴“I think that I see my way to clearing James McCarthy,” said Holmes. ²⁶⁵“Have you an order to see him in prison?”

²⁶⁶“Yes, but only for you and me.”

²⁶⁷“Then I shall reconsider my resolution about going out. ²⁶⁸We have still time to take a train to Hereford and see him to-night?”

²⁶⁹“Ample.”

²⁷⁰“Then let us do so. ²⁷¹Watson, I fear that you will find it very slow, but I shall only be away a couple of hours.”

²⁷²I 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. ²⁷³The 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. ²⁷⁴Supposing 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? ²⁷⁵It was something terrible and deadly. ²⁷⁶What could it be? ²⁷⁷Might not the nature of the injuries reveal something to my medical instincts? ²⁷⁸I rang the bell and called for the weekly county paper, which contained a verbatim account of the inquest. ²⁷⁹In 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. ²⁸⁰I marked the spot upon my own head. ²⁸¹Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. ²⁸²That was to some extent in favour of the accused, as when seen quarrelling he was face to face with his father. ²⁸³Still, it did not go for very much, for the older man might have turned his back before the blow fell. ²⁸⁴Still, it might be worth while to call Holmes' attention to it. ²⁸⁵Then there was the peculiar dying reference to a rat. ²⁸⁶What could that mean? ²⁸⁷It could not be delirium. ²⁸⁸A man dying from a sudden blow does not commonly become delirious. ²⁸⁹No, it was more likely to be an attempt to explain how he met his fate. ²⁹⁰But what could it indicate? ²⁹¹I cudgelled my brains to find some possible explanation. ²⁹²And then the incident of the grey cloth seen by young McCarthy. ²⁹³If 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. ²⁹⁴What a tissue of mysteries and improbabilities the whole thing was! ²⁹⁵I 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.

²⁹⁶It was late before Sherlock Holmes returned. ²⁹⁷He came back alone, for Lestrade was staying in lodgings in the town.

²⁹⁸"The glass still keeps very high," he remarked as he sat down. ²⁹⁹"It is of importance that it should not rain before we are able to go over the ground. ³⁰⁰On 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. ³⁰¹I have seen young McCarthy."

³⁰²"And what did you learn from him?"

³⁰³"Nothing."

³⁰⁴"Could he throw no light?"

³⁰⁵"None at all. ³⁰⁶I 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. ³⁰⁷He is not a very quick-witted youth, though comely to look at and, I should think, sound at heart."

³⁰⁸"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."

³⁰⁹"Ah, thereby hangs a rather painful tale. ³¹⁰This 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? ³¹¹No 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. ³¹²It 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. ³¹³On 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. ³¹⁴It was with his barmaid wife that he had spent the last three days in Bristol, and his father did not know where he was. ³¹⁵Mark that point. ³¹⁶It is of importance. ³¹⁷Good 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. ³¹⁸I think that that bit of news has consoled young McCarthy for all that he has suffered."

³¹⁹"But if he is innocent, who has done it?"

³²⁰"Ah! who? ³²¹I would call your attention very particularly to two points. ³²²One 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. ³²³The second is that the murdered man was heard to cry 'Cooee!' before he knew that his son had returned. ³²⁴Those are the crucial points upon which the case depends. ³²⁵And now let us talk about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all minor matters until to-morrow."

³²⁶There was no rain, as Holmes had foretold, and the morning broke bright and cloudless. ³²⁷At nine o'clock Lestrade called for us with the carriage, and we set off for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool.

³²⁸"There is serious news this morning," Lestrade observed. ³²⁹"It is said that Mr. Turner, of the Hall, is so ill that his life is despaired of."

³³⁰"An elderly man, I presume?" said Holmes.

³³¹"About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time. ³³²This business has had a very bad effect upon him. ³³³He 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."

³³⁴"Indeed! ³³⁵That is interesting," said Holmes.

³³⁶"Oh, yes! ³³⁷In a hundred other ways he has helped him. ³³⁸Everybody about here speaks of his kindness to him."

³³⁹"Really! ³⁴⁰Does 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? ³⁴¹It is the more strange, since we know that Turner himself was averse to the idea. ³⁴²The daughter told us as much. ³⁴³Do you not deduce something from that?"

³⁴⁴"We have got to the deductions and the inferences," said Lestrade, winking at me. ³⁴⁵"I find it hard enough to tackle facts, Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies."

³⁴⁶"You are right," said Holmes demurely; "you do find it very hard to tackle the facts."

³⁴⁷"Anyhow, I have grasped one fact which you seem to find it difficult to get hold of," replied Lestrade with some warmth.

³⁴⁸"And that is—"

³⁴⁹"That McCarthy senior met his death from McCarthy junior and that all theories to the contrary are the merest moonshine."

³⁵⁰“Well, moonshine is a brighter thing than fog,” said Holmes, laughing. ³⁵¹“But I am very much mistaken if this is not Hatherley Farm upon the left.”

³⁵²“Yes, that is it.” ³⁵³It was a widespread, comfortable-looking building, two-storied, slate-roofed, with great yellow blotches of lichen upon the grey walls. ³⁵⁴The drawn blinds and the smokeless chimneys, however, gave it a stricken look, as though the weight of this horror still lay heavy upon it. ³⁵⁵We 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. ³⁵⁶Having 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.

³⁵⁷Sherlock Holmes was transformed when he was hot upon such a scent as this. ³⁵⁸Men who had only known the quiet thinker and logician of Baker Street would have failed to recognise him. ³⁵⁹His face flushed and darkened. ³⁶⁰His brows were drawn into two hard black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter. ³⁶¹His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long, sinewy neck. ³⁶²His 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. ³⁶³Swiftly 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. ³⁶⁴It 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. ³⁶⁵Sometimes Holmes would hurry on, sometimes stop dead, and once he made quite a little detour into the meadow. ³⁶⁶Lestrade 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.

³⁶⁷The 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. ³⁶⁸Above 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. ³⁶⁹On 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. ³⁷⁰Lestrade 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. ³⁷¹To Holmes, as I could see by his eager face and peering eyes, very many other things were to be read upon the trampled grass. ³⁷²He ran round, like a dog who is picking up a scent, and then turned upon my companion.

³⁷³“What did you go into the pool for?” he asked.

³⁷⁴“I fished about with a rake. ³⁷⁵I thought there might be some weapon or other trace. ³⁷⁶But how on earth—”

³⁷⁷“Oh, tut, tut! ³⁷⁸I have no time! ³⁷⁹That left foot of yours with its inward twist is all over the place. ³⁸⁰A mole could trace it, and there it vanishes among the reeds. ³⁸¹Oh, how simple it would all have been had I been here before they came like a herd of buffalo and wallowed all over it. ³⁸²Here is where the party with the lodge-keeper came, and they have covered all tracks for six or eight feet round the body. ³⁸³But here are three separate tracks of the same feet.” ³⁸⁴He 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. ³⁸⁵“These are young McCarthy's feet. ³⁸⁶Twice he was walking, and once he ran swiftly, so that the soles are deeply marked and the heels hardly visible. ³⁸⁷That bears out his story. ³⁸⁸He ran when he saw his father on the ground. ³⁸⁹Then here are the father's feet as he paced up and down. ³⁹⁰What is this, then? ³⁹¹It is the butt-end of the gun as the son stood listening. ³⁹²And this? ³⁹³Ha, ha! ³⁹⁴What have we here? ³⁹⁵Tiptoes! tiptoes! ³⁹⁶Square, too, quite unusual boots! ³⁹⁷They come, they go, they come again—of course that was for the

cloak. ³⁹⁸Now where did they come from?" ³⁹⁹He 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. ⁴⁰⁰Holmes traced his way to the farther side of this and lay down once more upon his face with a little cry of satisfaction. ⁴⁰¹For 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. ⁴⁰²A jagged stone was lying among the moss, and this also he carefully examined and retained. ⁴⁰³Then he followed a pathway through the wood until he came to the highroad, where all traces were lost.

⁴⁰⁴"It has been a case of considerable interest," he remarked, returning to his natural manner. ⁴⁰⁵"I fancy that this grey house on the right must be the lodge. ⁴⁰⁶I think that I will go in and have a word with Moran, and perhaps write a little note. ⁴⁰⁷Having done that, we may drive back to our luncheon. ⁴⁰⁸You may walk to the cab, and I shall be with you presently."

⁴⁰⁹It 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.

⁴¹⁰"This may interest you, Lestrade," he remarked, holding it out. ⁴¹¹"The murder was done with it."

⁴¹²"I see no marks."

⁴¹³"There are none."

⁴¹⁴"How do you know, then?"

⁴¹⁵"The grass was growing under it. ⁴¹⁶It had only lain there a few days. ⁴¹⁷There was no sign of a place whence it had been taken. ⁴¹⁸It corresponds with the injuries. ⁴¹⁹There is no sign of any other weapon."

⁴²⁰"And the murderer?"

⁴²¹"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. ⁴²²There are several other indications, but these may be enough to aid us in our search."

⁴²³Lestrade laughed. ⁴²⁴"I am afraid that I am still a sceptic," he said. ⁴²⁵"Theories are all very well, but we have to deal with a hard-headed British jury."

⁴²⁶"Nous verrons," answered Holmes calmly. ⁴²⁷"You work your own method, and I shall work mine.

⁴²⁸I shall be busy this afternoon, and shall probably return to London by the evening train."

⁴²⁹"And leave your case unfinished?"

⁴³⁰"No, finished."

⁴³¹"But the mystery?"

⁴³²"It is solved."

⁴³³"Who was the criminal, then?"

⁴³⁴"The gentleman I describe."

⁴³⁵"But who is he?"

⁴³⁶"Surely it would not be difficult to find out. ⁴³⁷This is not such a populous neighbourhood."

⁴³⁸Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. ⁴³⁹"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. ⁴⁴⁰I should become the laughing-stock of Scotland Yard."

⁴⁴¹“All right,” said Holmes quietly. ⁴⁴²“I have given you the chance. ⁴⁴³Here are your lodgings. ⁴⁴⁴Good-bye. ⁴⁴⁵I shall drop you a line before I leave.”

⁴⁴⁶Having left Lestrade at his rooms, we drove to our hotel, where we found lunch upon the table.

⁴⁴⁷Holmes was silent and buried in thought with a pained expression upon his face, as one who finds himself in a perplexing position.

⁴⁴⁸“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. ⁴⁴⁹I don't know quite what to do, and I should value your advice. ⁴⁵⁰Light a cigar and let me expound.”

⁴⁵¹“Pray do so.”

⁴⁵²“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. ⁴⁵³One was the fact that his father should, according to his account, cry ‘Cooee!’ before seeing him. ⁴⁵⁴The other was his singular dying reference to a rat. ⁴⁵⁵He mumbled several words, you understand, but that was all that caught the son's ear. ⁴⁵⁶Now from this double point our research must commence, and we will begin it by presuming that what the lad says is absolutely true.”

⁴⁵⁷“What of this ‘Cooee!’ then?”

⁴⁵⁸“Well, obviously it could not have been meant for the son. ⁴⁵⁹The son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. ⁴⁶⁰It was mere chance that he was within earshot. ⁴⁶¹The ‘Cooee!’ was meant to attract the attention of whoever it was that he had the appointment with. ⁴⁶²But ‘Cooee’ is a distinctly Australian cry, and one which is used between Australians. ⁴⁶³There is a strong presumption that the person whom McCarthy expected to meet him at Boscombe Pool was someone who had been in Australia.”

⁴⁶⁴“What of the rat, then?”

⁴⁶⁵Sherlock Holmes took a folded paper from his pocket and flattened it out on the table. ⁴⁶⁶“This is a map of the Colony of Victoria,” he said. ⁴⁶⁷“I wired to Bristol for it last night.” ⁴⁶⁸He put his hand over part of the map. ⁴⁶⁹“What do you read?”

⁴⁷⁰“ARAT,” I read.

⁴⁷¹“And now?” ⁴⁷²He raised his hand.

⁴⁷³“BALLARAT.”

⁴⁷⁴“Quite so. ⁴⁷⁵That was the word the man uttered, and of which his son only caught the last two syllables. ⁴⁷⁶He was trying to utter the name of his murderer. ⁴⁷⁷So and so, of Ballarat.”

⁴⁷⁸“It is wonderful!” I exclaimed.

⁴⁷⁹“It is obvious. ⁴⁸⁰And now, you see, I had narrowed the field down considerably. ⁴⁸¹The possession of a grey garment was a third point which, granting the son's statement to be correct, was a certainty. ⁴⁸²We have come now out of mere vagueness to the definite conception of an Australian from Ballarat with a grey cloak.”

⁴⁸³“Certainly.”

⁴⁸⁴“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.”

⁴⁸⁵“Quite so.”

⁴⁸⁶“Then comes our expedition of to-day. ⁴⁸⁷By an examination of the ground I gained the trifling details which I gave to that imbecile Lestrade, as to the personality of the criminal.”

⁴⁸⁸“But how did you gain them?”

⁴⁸⁹“You know my method. ⁴⁹⁰It is founded upon the observation of trifles.”

⁴⁹¹“His height I know that you might roughly judge from the length of his stride. ⁴⁹²His boots, too, might be told from their traces.”

⁴⁹³“Yes, they were peculiar boots.”

⁴⁹⁴“But his lameness?”

⁴⁹⁵“The impression of his right foot was always less distinct than his left. ⁴⁹⁶He put less weight upon it. ⁴⁹⁷Why? ⁴⁹⁸Because he limped—he was lame.”

⁴⁹⁹“But his left-handedness.”

⁵⁰⁰“You were yourself struck by the nature of the injury as recorded by the surgeon at the inquest. ⁵⁰¹The blow was struck from immediately behind, and yet was upon the left side. ⁵⁰²Now, how can that be unless it were by a left-handed man? ⁵⁰³He had stood behind that tree during the interview between the father and son. ⁵⁰⁴He had even smoked there. ⁵⁰⁵I found the ash of a cigar, which my special knowledge of tobacco ashes enables me to pronounce as an Indian cigar. ⁵⁰⁶I 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. ⁵⁰⁷Having found the ash, I then looked round and discovered the stump among the moss where he had tossed it. ⁵⁰⁸It was an Indian cigar, of the variety which are rolled in Rotterdam.”

⁵⁰⁹“And the cigar-holder?”

⁵¹⁰“I could see that the end had not been in his mouth. ⁵¹¹Therefore he used a holder. ⁵¹²The tip had been cut off, not bitten off, but the cut was not a clean one, so I deduced a blunt pen-knife.”

⁵¹³“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. ⁵¹⁴I see the direction in which all this points. ⁵¹⁵The culprit is—”

⁵¹⁶“Mr. John Turner,” cried the hotel waiter, opening the door of our sitting-room, and ushering in a visitor.

⁵¹⁷The man who entered was a strange and impressive figure. ⁵¹⁸His 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. ⁵¹⁹His 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. ⁵²⁰It was clear to me at a glance that he was in the grip of some deadly and chronic disease.

⁵²¹“Pray sit down on the sofa,” said Holmes gently. ⁵²²“You had my note?”

⁵²³“Yes, the lodge-keeper brought it up. ⁵²⁴You said that you wished to see me here to avoid scandal.”

⁵²⁵“I thought people would talk if I went to the Hall.”

⁵²⁶“And why did you wish to see me?” ⁵²⁷He looked across at my companion with despair in his weary eyes, as though his question was already answered.

⁵²⁸“Yes,” said Holmes, answering the look rather than the words. ⁵²⁹“It is so. ⁵³⁰I know all about McCarthy.”

⁵³¹The old man sank his face in his hands. ⁵³²“God help me!” he cried. ⁵³³“But I would not have let the young man come to harm. ⁵³⁴I give you my word that I would have spoken out if it went against him at the Assizes.”

⁵³⁵“I am glad to hear you say so,” said Holmes gravely.

⁵³⁶“I would have spoken now had it not been for my dear girl. ⁵³⁷It would break her heart—it will break her heart when she hears that I am arrested.”

⁵³⁸“It may not come to that,” said Holmes.

⁵³⁹“What?”

⁵⁴⁰“I am no official agent. ⁵⁴¹I understand that it was your daughter who required my presence here, and I am acting in her interests. ⁵⁴²Young McCarthy must be got off, however.”

⁵⁴³“I am a dying man,” said old Turner. ⁵⁴⁴“I have had diabetes for years. ⁵⁴⁵My doctor says it is a question whether I shall live a month. ⁵⁴⁶Yet I would rather die under my own roof than in a jail.”

⁵⁴⁷Holmes rose and sat down at the table with his pen in his hand and a bundle of paper before him. ⁵⁴⁸“Just tell us the truth,” he said. ⁵⁴⁹“I shall jot down the facts. ⁵⁵⁰You will sign it, and Watson here can witness it. ⁵⁵¹Then I could produce your confession at the last extremity to save young McCarthy. ⁵⁵²I promise you that I shall not use it unless it is absolutely needed.”

⁵⁵³“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. ⁵⁵⁴And 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.

⁵⁵⁵“You didn't know this dead man, McCarthy. ⁵⁵⁶He was a devil incarnate. ⁵⁵⁷I tell you that. ⁵⁵⁸God keep you out of the clutches of such a man as he. ⁵⁵⁹His grip has been upon me these twenty years, and he has blasted my life. ⁵⁶⁰I'll tell you first how I came to be in his power.

⁵⁶¹“It was in the early '60's at the diggings. ⁵⁶²I 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. ⁵⁶³There 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. ⁵⁶⁴Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I went under, and our party is still remembered in the colony as the Ballarat Gang.

⁵⁶⁵“One day a gold convoy came down from Ballarat to Melbourne, and we lay in wait for it and attacked it. ⁵⁶⁶There were six troopers and six of us, so it was a close thing, but we emptied four of their saddles at the first volley. ⁵⁶⁷Three of our boys were killed, however, before we got the swag. ⁵⁶⁸I put my pistol to the head of the wagon-driver, who was this very man McCarthy. ⁵⁶⁹I 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. ⁵⁷⁰We got away with the gold, became wealthy men, and made our way over to England without being suspected. ⁵⁷¹There I parted from my old pals and determined to settle down to a quiet and respectable life. ⁵⁷²I 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. ⁵⁷³I married, too, and though my wife died young she left me my dear little Alice. ⁵⁷⁴Even when she was just a baby her wee hand seemed to lead me down the right path as nothing else had ever done. ⁵⁷⁵In a word, I turned over a new leaf and did my best to make up for the past. ⁵⁷⁶All was going well when McCarthy laid his grip upon me.

⁵⁷⁷“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.

⁵⁷⁸“‘Here we are, Jack,’ says he, touching me on the arm; ‘we’ll be as good as a family to you. ⁵⁷⁹There’s two of us, me and my son, and you can have the keeping of us. ⁵⁸⁰If you don’t—it’s a fine, law-abiding country is England, and there’s always a policeman within hail.’

⁵⁸¹“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. ⁵⁸²There was no rest for me, no peace, no forgetfulness; turn where I would, there was his cunning, grinning face at my elbow. ⁵⁸³It grew worse as Alice grew up, for he soon saw I was more afraid of her knowing my past than of the police. ⁵⁸⁴Whatever 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. ⁵⁸⁵He asked for Alice.

⁵⁸⁶“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. ⁵⁸⁷But there I was firm. ⁵⁸⁸I 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. ⁵⁸⁹I stood firm. ⁵⁹⁰McCarthy threatened. ⁵⁹¹I braved him to do his worst. ⁵⁹²We were to meet at the pool midway between our houses to talk it over.

⁵⁹³“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. ⁵⁹⁴But as I listened to his talk all that was black and bitter in me seemed to come uppermost. ⁵⁹⁵He 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. ⁵⁹⁶It 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. ⁵⁹⁷Could I not snap the bond? ⁵⁹⁸I was already a dying and a desperate man. ⁵⁹⁹Though clear of mind and fairly strong of limb, I knew that my own fate was sealed. ⁶⁰⁰But my memory and my girl! ⁶⁰¹Both could be saved if I could but silence that foul tongue. ⁶⁰²I did it, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁰³I would do it again. ⁶⁰⁴Deeply as I have sinned, I have led a life of martyrdom to atone for it. ⁶⁰⁵But that my girl should be entangled in the same meshes which held me was more than I could suffer. ⁶⁰⁶I struck him down with no more compunction than if he had been some foul and venomous beast. ⁶⁰⁷His 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. ⁶⁰⁸That is the true story, gentlemen, of all that occurred.”

⁶⁰⁹“Well, it is not for me to judge you,” said Holmes as the old man signed the statement which had been drawn out. ⁶¹⁰“I pray that we may never be exposed to such a temptation.”

⁶¹¹“I pray not, sir. ⁶¹²And what do you intend to do?”

⁶¹³“In view of your health, nothing. ⁶¹⁴You are yourself aware that you will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher court than the Assizes. ⁶¹⁵I will keep your confession, and if McCarthy is condemned I shall be forced to use it. ⁶¹⁶If not, it shall never be seen by mortal eye; and your secret, whether you be alive or dead, shall be safe with us.”

⁶¹⁷“Farewell, then,” said the old man solemnly. ⁶¹⁸“Your own deathbeds, when they come, will be the easier for the thought of the peace which you have given to mine.” ⁶¹⁹Tottering and shaking in all his giant frame, he stumbled slowly from the room.

⁶²⁰“God help us!” said Holmes after a long silence. ⁶²¹“Why does fate play such tricks with poor, helpless worms? ⁶²²I 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.’”

⁶²³James 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. ⁶²⁴Old 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.

The Five Orange Pips

¹When 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. ²Some, 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. ³Some, 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. ⁴There 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.

⁵The year '87 furnished us with a long series of cases of greater or less interest, of which I retain the records. ⁶Among 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. ⁷In 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. ⁸All 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.

⁹It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales had set in with exceptional violence. ¹⁰All 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. ¹¹As evening drew in, the storm grew higher and louder, and the wind cried and sobbed like a child in the chimney. ¹²Sherlock 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. ¹³My 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.

¹⁴"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. ¹⁵Who could come to-night?" ¹⁶"Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

¹⁷"Except yourself I have none," he answered. ¹⁸"I do not encourage visitors."

¹⁹"A client, then?"

²⁰"If so, it is a serious case. ²¹Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day and at such an hour.

²²But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

²³Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. ²⁴He stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

²⁵"Come in!" said he.

²⁶The 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. ²⁷The streaming umbrella which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told of the fierce weather through which he had come. ²⁸He 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.

²⁹"I owe you an apology," he said, raising his golden pince-nez to his eyes. ³⁰"I trust that I am not intruding. ³¹I fear that I have brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug chamber."

³²"Give me your coat and umbrella," said Holmes. ³³"They may rest here on the hook and will be dry presently. ³⁴You have come up from the south-west, I see."

³⁵"Yes, from Horsham."

³⁶"That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is quite distinctive."

³⁷"I have come for advice."

³⁸"That is easily got."

³⁹"And help."

⁴⁰"That is not always so easy."

⁴¹"I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes. ⁴²I heard from Major Prendergast how you saved him in the Tankerville Club scandal."

⁴³"Ah, of course. ⁴⁴He was wrongfully accused of cheating at cards."

⁴⁵"He said that you could solve anything."

⁴⁶"He said too much."

⁴⁷"That you are never beaten."

⁴⁸"I have been beaten four times—three times by men, and once by a woman."

⁴⁹"But what is that compared with the number of your successes?"

⁵⁰"It is true that I have been generally successful."

⁵¹"Then you may be so with me."

⁵²"I beg that you will draw your chair up to the fire and favour me with some details as to your case."

⁵³"It is no ordinary one."

⁵⁴"None of those which come to me are. ⁵⁵I am the last court of appeal."

⁵⁶"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."

⁵⁷"You fill me with interest," said Holmes. ⁵⁸"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."

⁵⁹The young man pulled his chair up and pushed his wet feet out towards the blaze.

⁶⁰"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. ⁶¹It 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.

⁶²“You must know that my grandfather had two sons—my uncle Elias and my father Joseph. ⁶³My father had a small factory at Coventry, which he enlarged at the time of the invention of bicycling. ⁶⁴He 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.

⁶⁵“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. ⁶⁶At the time of the war he fought in Jackson's army, and afterwards under Hood, where he rose to be a colonel. ⁶⁷When Lee laid down his arms my uncle returned to his plantation, where he remained for three or four years. ⁶⁸About 1869 or 1870 he came back to Europe and took a small estate in Sussex, near Horsham. ⁶⁹He 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. ⁷⁰He was a singular man, fierce and quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring disposition. ⁷¹During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town. ⁷²He 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. ⁷³He 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.

⁷⁴“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. ⁷⁵This would be in the year 1878, after he had been eight or nine years in England. ⁷⁶He begged my father to let me live with him and he was very kind to me in his way. ⁷⁷When 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. ⁷⁸I 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. ⁷⁹There 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. ⁸⁰With 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.

⁸¹“One day—it was in March, 1883—a letter with a foreign stamp lay upon the table in front of the colonel's plate. ⁸²It 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. ⁸³‘From India!’ said he as he took it up, ‘Pondicherry postmark! ⁸⁴What can this be?’ ⁸⁵Opening it hurriedly, out there jumped five little dried orange pips, which pattered down upon his plate. ⁸⁶I began to laugh at this, but the laugh was struck from my lips at the sight of his face. ⁸⁷His 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!’

⁸⁸“‘What is it, uncle?’ I cried.

⁸⁹“‘Death,’ said he, and rising from the table he retired to his room, leaving me palpitating with horror. ⁹⁰I took up the envelope and saw scrawled in red ink upon the inner flap, just above the gum, the letter K three times repeated. ⁹¹There was nothing else save the five dried pips. ⁹²What could be the reason of his overpowering terror? ⁹³I 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.

⁹⁴“‘They may do what they like, but I'll checkmate them still,’ said he with an oath. ⁹⁵‘Tell Mary that I shall want a fire in my room to-day, and send down to Fordham, the Horsham lawyer.’

⁹⁶“I did as he ordered, and when the lawyer arrived I was asked to step up to the room. ⁹⁷The 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. ⁹⁸As 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.

⁹⁹“I wish you, John,” said my uncle, “to witness my will. ¹⁰⁰I leave my estate, with all its advantages and all its disadvantages, to my brother, your father, whence it will, no doubt, descend to you. ¹⁰¹If you can enjoy it in peace, well and good! ¹⁰²If you find you cannot, take my advice, my boy, and leave it to your deadliest enemy. ¹⁰³I am sorry to give you such a two-edged thing, but I can’t say what turn things are going to take. ¹⁰⁴Kindly sign the paper where Mr. Fordham shows you.”

¹⁰⁵“I signed the paper as directed, and the lawyer took it away with him. ¹⁰⁶The 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. ¹⁰⁷Yet 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. ¹⁰⁸I could see a change in my uncle, however. ¹⁰⁹He drank more than ever, and he was less inclined for any sort of society. ¹¹⁰Most 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. ¹¹¹When 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. ¹¹²At such times I have seen his face, even on a cold day, glisten with moisture, as though it were new raised from a basin.

¹¹³“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. ¹¹⁴We 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. ¹¹⁵There 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.’ ¹¹⁶But 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. ¹¹⁷The matter passed, however, and my father entered into possession of the estate, and of some £14,000, which lay to his credit at the bank.”

¹¹⁸“One moment,” Holmes interposed, “your statement is, I foresee, one of the most remarkable to which I have ever listened. ¹¹⁹Let me have the date of the reception by your uncle of the letter, and the date of his supposed suicide.”

¹²⁰“The letter arrived on March 10, 1883. ¹²¹His death was seven weeks later, upon the night of May 2nd.”

¹²²“Thank you. ¹²³Pray proceed.”

¹²⁴“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. ¹²⁵We found the brass box there, although its contents had been destroyed. ¹²⁶On 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. ¹²⁷These, we presume, indicated the nature of the papers which had been destroyed by Colonel Openshaw. ¹²⁸For 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. ¹²⁹Some 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. ¹³⁰Others 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.

¹³¹“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. ¹³²On 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. ¹³³There he was, sitting with a newly opened envelope in one hand and five dried orange pips in the outstretched palm of the other one. ¹³⁴He 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.

¹³⁵“Why, what on earth does this mean, John?” he stammered.

¹³⁶“My heart had turned to lead. ¹³⁷‘It is K. K. K.,’ said I.

¹³⁸“He looked inside the envelope. ¹³⁹‘So it is,’ he cried. ¹⁴⁰‘Here are the very letters. ¹⁴¹But what is this written above them?’

¹⁴²“‘Put the papers on the sundial,’ I read, peeping over his shoulder.

¹⁴³“‘What papers? ¹⁴⁴What sundial?’ he asked.

¹⁴⁵“‘The sundial in the garden. ¹⁴⁶There is no other,’ said I; ‘but the papers must be those that are destroyed.’

¹⁴⁷“‘Pooh!’ said he, gripping hard at his courage. ¹⁴⁸‘We are in a civilised land here, and we can’t have tomfoolery of this kind. ¹⁴⁹Where does the thing come from?’

¹⁵⁰“‘From Dundee,’ I answered, glancing at the postmark.

¹⁵¹“‘Some preposterous practical joke,’ said he. ¹⁵²‘What have I to do with sundials and papers? ¹⁵³I shall take no notice of such nonsense.’

¹⁵⁴“‘I should certainly speak to the police,’ I said.

¹⁵⁵“‘And be laughed at for my pains. ¹⁵⁶Nothing of the sort.’

¹⁵⁷“‘Then let me do so?’

¹⁵⁸“‘No, I forbid you. ¹⁵⁹I won’t have a fuss made about such nonsense.’

¹⁶⁰“It was in vain to argue with him, for he was a very obstinate man. ¹⁶¹I went about, however, with a heart which was full of forebodings.

¹⁶²“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. ¹⁶³I was glad that he should go, for it seemed to me that he was farther from danger when he was away from home. ¹⁶⁴In that, however, I was in error. ¹⁶⁵Upon the second day of his absence I received a telegram from the major, imploring me to come at once. ¹⁶⁶My father had fallen over one of the deep chalk-pits which abound in the neighbourhood, and was lying senseless, with a shattered skull. ¹⁶⁷I hurried to him, but he passed away without having ever recovered his consciousness. ¹⁶⁸He 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.’ ¹⁶⁹Carefully as I examined every fact connected with his death, I was unable to find anything which could suggest the idea of murder. ¹⁷⁰There were no signs of violence, no footmarks, no robbery, no record of strangers having been seen upon the roads. ¹⁷¹And 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.

¹⁷²“In this sinister way I came into my inheritance. ¹⁷³You will ask me why I did not dispose of it? ¹⁷⁴I 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.

¹⁷⁵“It was in January, ’85, that my poor father met his end, and two years and eight months have elapsed since then. ¹⁷⁶During 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. ¹⁷⁷I 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.”

¹⁷⁸The young man took from his waistcoat a crumpled envelope, and turning to the table he shook out upon it five little dried orange pips.

¹⁷⁹“This is the envelope,” he continued. ¹⁸⁰“The postmark is London—eastern division. ¹⁸¹Within are the very words which were upon my father's last message: ‘K. K. K.’; and then ‘Put the papers on the sundial.’”

¹⁸²“What have you done?” asked Holmes.

¹⁸³“Nothing.”

¹⁸⁴“Nothing?”

¹⁸⁵“To tell the truth”—he sank his face into his thin, white hands—“I have felt helpless. ¹⁸⁶I have felt like one of those poor rabbits when the snake is writhing towards it. ¹⁸⁷I seem to be in the grasp of some resistless, inexorable evil, which no foresight and no precautions can guard against.”

¹⁸⁸“Tut! tut!” cried Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁸⁹“You must act, man, or you are lost. ¹⁹⁰Nothing but energy can save you. ¹⁹¹This is no time for despair.”

¹⁹²“I have seen the police.”

¹⁹³“Ah!”

¹⁹⁴“But they listened to my story with a smile. ¹⁹⁵I 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.”

¹⁹⁶Holmes shook his clenched hands in the air. ¹⁹⁷“Incredible imbecility!” he cried.

¹⁹⁸“They have, however, allowed me a policeman, who may remain in the house with me.”

¹⁹⁹“Has he come with you to-night?”

²⁰⁰“No. ²⁰¹His orders were to stay in the house.”

²⁰²Again Holmes raved in the air.

²⁰³“Why did you come to me,” he cried, “and, above all, why did you not come at once?”

²⁰⁴“I did not know. ²⁰⁵It was only to-day that I spoke to Major Prendergast about my troubles and was advised by him to come to you.”

²⁰⁶“It is really two days since you had the letter. ²⁰⁷We should have acted before this. ²⁰⁸You have no further evidence, I suppose, than that which you have placed before us—no suggestive detail which might help us?”

²⁰⁹“There is one thing,” said John Openshaw. ²¹⁰He rummaged in his coat pocket, and, drawing out a piece of discoloured, blue-tinted paper, he laid it out upon the table. ²¹¹“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. ²¹²I 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. ²¹³Beyond the mention of pips, I do not see that it helps us much. ²¹⁴I think myself that it is a page from some private diary. ²¹⁵The writing is undoubtedly my uncle's.”

²¹⁶Holmes 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. ²¹⁷It was headed, "March, 1869," and beneath were the following enigmatical notices:

²¹⁸4th. Hudson came. ²¹⁹Same old platform.

²²⁰7th. Set the pips on McCauley, Paramore, and John Swain, of St Augustine.

²²¹9th. McCauley cleared.

²²²10th. John Swain cleared.

²²³12th. Visited Paramore. ²²⁴All well.

²²⁵"Thank you!" said Holmes, folding up the paper and returning it to our visitor. ²²⁶"And now you must on no account lose another instant. ²²⁷We cannot spare time even to discuss what you have told me. ²²⁸You must get home instantly and act."

²²⁹"What shall I do?"

²³⁰"There is but one thing to do. ²³¹It must be done at once. ²³²You must put this piece of paper which you have shown us into the brass box which you have described. ²³³You 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. ²³⁴You must assert that in such words as will carry conviction with them. ²³⁵Having done this, you must at once put the box out upon the sundial, as directed. ²³⁶Do you understand?"

²³⁷"Entirely."

²³⁸"Do not think of revenge, or anything of the sort, at present. ²³⁹I think that we may gain that by means of the law; but we have our web to weave, while theirs is already woven. ²⁴⁰The first consideration is to remove the pressing danger which threatens you. ²⁴¹The second is to clear up the mystery and to punish the guilty parties."

²⁴²"I thank you," said the young man, rising and pulling on his overcoat. ²⁴³"You have given me fresh life and hope. ²⁴⁴I shall certainly do as you advise."

²⁴⁵"Do not lose an instant. ²⁴⁶And, 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. ²⁴⁷How do you go back?"

²⁴⁸"By train from Waterloo."

²⁴⁹"It is not yet nine. ²⁵⁰The streets will be crowded, so I trust that you may be in safety. ²⁵¹And yet you cannot guard yourself too closely."

²⁵²"I am armed."

²⁵³"That is well. ²⁵⁴To-morrow I shall set to work upon your case."

²⁵⁵"I shall see you at Horsham, then?"

²⁵⁶"No, your secret lies in London. ²⁵⁷It is there that I shall seek it."

²⁵⁸"Then I shall call upon you in a day, or in two days, with news as to the box and the papers. ²⁵⁹I shall take your advice in every particular." ²⁶⁰He shook hands with us and took his leave. ²⁶¹Outside the wind still screamed and the rain splashed and pattered against the windows. ²⁶²This 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.

²⁶³Sherlock Holmes sat for some time in silence, with his head sunk forward and his eyes bent upon the red glow of the fire. ²⁶⁴Then 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.

²⁶⁵“I think, Watson,” he remarked at last, “that of all our cases we have had none more fantastic than this.”

²⁶⁶“Save, perhaps, the Sign of Four.”

²⁶⁷“Well, yes. ²⁶⁸Save, perhaps, that. ²⁶⁹And yet this John Openshaw seems to me to be walking amid even greater perils than did the Sholtos.”

²⁷⁰“But have you,” I asked, “formed any definite conception as to what these perils are?”

²⁷¹“There can be no question as to their nature,” he answered.

²⁷²“Then what are they? ²⁷³Who is this K. K. K., and why does he pursue this unhappy family?”

²⁷⁴Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his elbows upon the arms of his chair, with his fingertips together. ²⁷⁵“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. ²⁷⁶As 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. ²⁷⁷We have not yet grasped the results which the reason alone can attain to. ²⁷⁸Problems may be solved in the study which have baffled all those who have sought a solution by the aid of their senses. ²⁷⁹To 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. ²⁸⁰It 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. ²⁸¹If I remember rightly, you on one occasion, in the early days of our friendship, defined my limits in a very precise fashion.”

²⁸²“Yes,” I answered, laughing. ²⁸³“It was a singular document. ²⁸⁴Philosophy, astronomy, and politics were marked at zero, I remember. ²⁸⁵Botany 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. ²⁸⁶Those, I think, were the main points of my analysis.”

²⁸⁷Holmes grinned at the last item. ²⁸⁸“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. ²⁸⁹Now, for such a case as the one which has been submitted to us to-night, we need certainly to muster all our resources. ²⁹⁰Kindly hand me down the letter K of the ‘American Encyclopaedia’ which stands upon the shelf beside you. ²⁹¹Thank you. ²⁹²Now let us consider the situation and see what may be deduced from it. ²⁹³In the first place, we may start with a strong presumption that Colonel Openshaw had some very strong reason for leaving America. ²⁹⁴Men 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. ²⁹⁵His 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. ²⁹⁶As to what it was he feared, we can only deduce that by considering the formidable letters which were received by himself and his successors. ²⁹⁷Did you remark the postmarks of those letters?”

²⁹⁸“The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the third from London.”

²⁹⁹“From East London. ³⁰⁰What do you deduce from that?”

³⁰¹“They are all seaports. ³⁰²That the writer was on board of a ship.”

³⁰³“Excellent. ³⁰⁴We have already a clue. ³⁰⁵There can be no doubt that the probability—the strong probability—is that the writer was on board of a ship. ³⁰⁶And now let us consider another point. ³⁰⁷In the case of Pondicherry, seven weeks elapsed between the threat and its fulfilment, in Dundee it was only some three or four days. ³⁰⁸Does that suggest anything?”

³⁰⁹“A greater distance to travel.”

³¹⁰“But the letter had also a greater distance to come.”

³¹¹“Then I do not see the point.”

³¹²“There is at least a presumption that the vessel in which the man or men are is a sailing-ship. ³¹³It looks as if they always send their singular warning or token before them when starting upon their mission. ³¹⁴You see how quickly the deed followed the sign when it came from Dundee. ³¹⁵If they had come from Pondicherry in a steamer they would have arrived almost as soon as their letter. ³¹⁶But, as a matter of fact, seven weeks elapsed. ³¹⁷I think that those seven weeks represented the difference between the mail-boat which brought the letter and the sailing vessel which brought the writer.”

³¹⁸“It is possible.”

³¹⁹“More than that. ³²⁰It is probable. ³²¹And now you see the deadly urgency of this new case, and why I urged young Openshaw to caution. ³²²The blow has always fallen at the end of the time which it would take the senders to travel the distance. ³²³But this one comes from London, and therefore we cannot count upon delay.”

³²⁴“Good God!” I cried. ³²⁵“What can it mean, this relentless persecution?”

³²⁶“The papers which Openshaw carried are obviously of vital importance to the person or persons in the sailing-ship. ³²⁷I think that it is quite clear that there must be more than one of them. ³²⁸A single man could not have carried out two deaths in such a way as to deceive a coroner's jury. ³²⁹There must have been several in it, and they must have been men of resource and determination. ³³⁰Their papers they mean to have, be the holder of them who it may. ³³¹In this way you see K. K. K. ceases to be the initials of an individual and becomes the badge of a society.”

³³²“But of what society?”

³³³“Have you never—” said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and sinking his voice—“have you never heard of the Ku Klux Klan?”

³³⁴“I never have.”

³³⁵Holmes turned over the leaves of the book upon his knee. ³³⁶“Here it is,” said he presently:

³³⁷“Ku Klux Klan. ³³⁸A name derived from the fanciful resemblance to the sound produced by cocking a rifle. ³³⁹This 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. ³⁴⁰Its 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. ³⁴¹Its 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. ³⁴²On receiving this the victim might either openly abjure his former ways, or might fly from the country. ³⁴³If he braved the matter out, death would unfailingly come upon him, and usually in some strange and unforeseen manner. ³⁴⁴So 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.³⁴⁵ 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.³⁴⁶ Eventually, in the year 1869, the movement rather suddenly collapsed, although there have been sporadic outbreaks of the same sort since that date.'

³⁴⁷"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.³⁴⁸ It may well have been cause and effect.³⁴⁹ It is no wonder that he and his family have some of the more implacable spirits upon their track.³⁵⁰ 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."

³⁵¹"Then the page we have seen—"

³⁵²"Is such as we might expect.³⁵³ It ran, if I remember right, 'sent the pips to A, B, and C'—that is, sent the society's warning to them.³⁵⁴ 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.³⁵⁵ 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.³⁵⁶ 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."

³⁵⁷It had cleared in the morning, and the sun was shining with a subdued brightness through the dim veil which hangs over the great city.³⁵⁸ Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came down.

³⁵⁹"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."

³⁶⁰"What steps will you take?" I asked.

³⁶¹"It will very much depend upon the results of my first inquiries.³⁶² I may have to go down to Horsham, after all."

³⁶³"You will not go there first?"

³⁶⁴"No, I shall commence with the City.³⁶⁵ Just ring the bell and the maid will bring up your coffee."

³⁶⁶As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and glanced my eye over it.³⁶⁷ It rested upon a heading which sent a chill to my heart.

³⁶⁸"Holmes," I cried, "you are too late."

³⁶⁹"Ah!" said he, laying down his cup, "I feared as much.³⁷⁰ How was it done?"³⁷¹ He spoke calmly, but I could see that he was deeply moved.

³⁷²"My eye caught the name of Openshaw, and the heading 'Tragedy Near Waterloo Bridge.'³⁷³ Here is the account:

³⁷⁴"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.³⁷⁵ 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.³⁷⁶ The alarm, however, was given, and, by the aid of the water-police, the body was eventually recovered.³⁷⁷ 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.³⁷⁸ 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. ³⁷⁹The 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."

³⁸⁰"We sat in silence for some minutes, Holmes more depressed and shaken than I had ever seen him.

³⁸¹"That hurts my pride, Watson," he said at last. ³⁸²"It is a petty feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride.

³⁸³It becomes a personal matter with me now, and, if God sends me health, I shall set my hand upon this gang. ³⁸⁴That he should come to me for help, and that I should send him away to his death—!" ³⁸⁵He sprang from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable agitation, with a flush upon his sallow cheeks and a nervous clasping and unclasping of his long thin hands.

³⁸⁶"They must be cunning devils," he exclaimed at last. ³⁸⁷"How could they have decoyed him down there? ³⁸⁸The Embankment is not on the direct line to the station. ³⁸⁹The bridge, no doubt, was too crowded, even on such a night, for their purpose. ³⁹⁰Well, Watson, we shall see who will win in the long run. I am going out now!"

³⁹¹"To the police?"

³⁹²"No; I shall be my own police. ³⁹³When I have spun the web they may take the flies, but not before."

³⁹⁴All day I was engaged in my professional work, and it was late in the evening before I returned to Baker Street. ³⁹⁵Sherlock Holmes had not come back yet. ³⁹⁶It was nearly ten o'clock before he entered, looking pale and worn. ³⁹⁷He 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.

³⁹⁸"You are hungry," I remarked.

³⁹⁹"Starving. ⁴⁰⁰It had escaped my memory. ⁴⁰¹I have had nothing since breakfast."

⁴⁰²"Nothing?"

⁴⁰³"Not a bite. ⁴⁰⁴I had no time to think of it."

⁴⁰⁵"And how have you succeeded?"

⁴⁰⁶"Well."

⁴⁰⁷"You have a clue?"

⁴⁰⁸"I have them in the hollow of my hand. ⁴⁰⁹Young Openshaw shall not long remain unavenged.

⁴¹⁰Why, Watson, let us put their own devilish trade-mark upon them. ⁴¹¹It is well thought of!"

⁴¹²"What do you mean?"

⁴¹³He took an orange from the cupboard, and tearing it to pieces he squeezed out the pips upon the table.

⁴¹⁴Of these he took five and thrust them into an envelope. ⁴¹⁵On the inside of the flap he wrote "S. H. for J. O." ⁴¹⁶Then he sealed it and addressed it to "Captain James Calhoun, Barque Lone Star, Savannah, Georgia."

⁴¹⁷"That will await him when he enters port," said he, chuckling. ⁴¹⁸"It may give him a sleepless night.

⁴¹⁹He will find it as sure a precursor of his fate as Openshaw did before him."

⁴²⁰"And who is this Captain Calhoun?"

⁴²¹"The leader of the gang. ⁴²²I shall have the others, but he first."

⁴²³“How did you trace it, then?”

⁴²⁴He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all covered with dates and names.

⁴²⁵“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. ⁴²⁶There were thirty-six ships of fair tonnage which were reported there during those months. ⁴²⁷Of 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.”

⁴²⁸“Texas, I think.”

⁴²⁹“I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the ship must have an American origin.”

⁴³⁰“What then?”

⁴³¹“I searched the Dundee records, and when I found that the barque Lone Star was there in January, '85, my suspicion became a certainty. ⁴³²I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at present in the port of London.”

⁴³³“Yes?”

⁴³⁴“The Lone Star had arrived here last week. ⁴³⁵I 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. ⁴³⁶I 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.”

⁴³⁷“What will you do, then?”

⁴³⁸“Oh, I have my hand upon him. ⁴³⁹He and the two mates, are as I learn, the only native-born Americans in the ship. ⁴⁴⁰The others are Finns and Germans. ⁴⁴¹I know, also, that they were all three away from the ship last night. ⁴⁴²I had it from the stevedore who has been loading their cargo. ⁴⁴³By 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.”

⁴⁴⁴There 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. ⁴⁴⁵Very long and very severe were the equinoctial gales that year. ⁴⁴⁶We waited long for news of the Lone Star of Savannah, but none ever reached us. ⁴⁴⁷We 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.

The Man with the Twisted Lip

¹Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium. ²The 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. ³He 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. ⁴I 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.

⁵One 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. ⁶I sat up in my chair, and my wife laid her needle-work down in her lap and made a little face of disappointment.

⁷“A patient!” said she. ⁸“You'll have to go out.”

⁹I groaned, for I was newly come back from a weary day.

¹⁰We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps upon the linoleum. ¹¹Our own door flew open, and a lady, clad in some dark-coloured stuff, with a black veil, entered the room.

¹²“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. ¹³“Oh, I'm in such trouble!” she cried; “I do so want a little help.”

¹⁴“Why,” said my wife, pulling up her veil, “it is Kate Whitney. ¹⁵How you startled me, Kate! ¹⁶I had not an idea who you were when you came in.”

¹⁷“I didn't know what to do, so I came straight to you.” ¹⁸That was always the way. ¹⁹Folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds to a light-house.

²⁰“It was very sweet of you to come. ²¹Now, you must have some wine and water, and sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. ²²Or should you rather that I sent James off to bed?”

²³“Oh, no, no! ²⁴I want the doctor's advice and help, too. ²⁵It's about Isa. ²⁶He has not been home for two days. ²⁷I am so frightened about him!”

²⁸It 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. ²⁹We soothed and comforted her by such words as we could find. ³⁰Did she know where her husband was? ³¹Was it possible that we could bring him back to her?

³²It seems that it was. ³³She 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. ³⁴Hitherto his orgies had always been confined to one day, and he had come back, twitching and shattered, in the evening. ³⁵But 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. ³⁶There he was to be found, she was sure of it, at the Bar of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane. ³⁷But what was she to do? ³⁸How 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?

³⁹There was the case, and of course there was but one way out of it. ⁴⁰Might I not escort her to this place? ⁴¹And then, as a second thought, why should she come at all? ⁴²I was Isa Whitney's medical adviser, and as such I had influence over him. ⁴³I could manage it better if I were alone. ⁴⁴I 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.⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my adventure. ⁴⁷Upper 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.

⁴⁸Between 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. ⁴⁹Ordering 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 forecastle of an emigrant ship.

⁵⁰Through 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, lacklustre eye turned upon the newcomer. ⁵¹Out 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.

⁵²The 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. ⁵³At 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.

⁵⁴As 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.

⁵⁵"Thank you. I have not come to stay," said I. ⁵⁶"There is a friend of mine here, Mr. Isa Whitney, and I wish to speak with him."

⁵⁷There 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.

⁵⁸"My God! ⁵⁹It's Watson," said he. ⁶⁰He was in a pitiable state of reaction, with every nerve in a twitter.

⁶¹"I say, Watson, what o'clock is it?"

⁶²"Nearly eleven."

⁶³"Of what day?"

⁶⁴"Of Friday, June 19th."

⁶⁵"Good heavens! ⁶⁶I thought it was Wednesday. ⁶⁷It is Wednesday. ⁶⁸What d'you want to frighten a chap for?" ⁶⁹He sank his face onto his arms and began to sob in a high treble key.

⁷⁰"I tell you that it is Friday, man. ⁷¹Your wife has been waiting this two days for you. ⁷²You should be ashamed of yourself!"

⁷³"So I am. ⁷⁴But you've got mixed, Watson, for I have only been here a few hours, three pipes, four pipes—I forget how many. ⁷⁵But I'll go home with you. ⁷⁶I wouldn't frighten Kate—poor little Kate.

⁷⁷Give me your hand! ⁷⁸Have you a cab?"

⁷⁹"Yes, I have one waiting."

⁸⁰“Then I shall go in it. ⁸¹But I must owe something. ⁸²Find what I owe, Watson. ⁸³I am all off colour. ⁸⁴I can do nothing for myself.”

⁸⁵I 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. ⁸⁶As 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.” ⁸⁷The words fell quite distinctly upon my ear. ⁸⁸I glanced down. ⁸⁹They 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. ⁹⁰I took two steps forward and looked back. ⁹¹It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. ⁹²He had turned his back so that none could see him but I. ⁹³His 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. ⁹⁴He 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.

⁹⁵“Holmes!” I whispered, “what on earth are you doing in this den?”

⁹⁶“As low as you can,” he answered; “I have excellent ears. ⁹⁷If 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.”

⁹⁸“I have a cab outside.”

⁹⁹“Then pray send him home in it. ¹⁰⁰You may safely trust him, for he appears to be too limp to get into any mischief. ¹⁰¹I 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. ¹⁰²If you will wait outside, I shall be with you in five minutes.”

¹⁰³It 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. ¹⁰⁴I 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. ¹⁰⁵In 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. ¹⁰⁶In a very short time a decrepit figure had emerged from the opium den, and I was walking down the street with Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁰⁷For two streets he shuffled along with a bent back and an uncertain foot. ¹⁰⁸Then, glancing quickly round, he straightened himself out and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

¹⁰⁹“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.”

¹¹⁰“I was certainly surprised to find you there.”

¹¹¹“But not more so than I to find you.”

¹¹²“I came to find a friend.”

¹¹³“And I to find an enemy.”

¹¹⁴“An enemy?”

¹¹⁵“Yes; one of my natural enemies, or, shall I say, my natural prey. ¹¹⁶Briefly, 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. ¹¹⁷Had 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. ¹¹⁸There 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."

¹¹⁹"What! ¹²⁰You do not mean bodies?"

¹²¹"Ay, bodies, Watson. ¹²²We should be rich men if we had £1000 for every poor devil who has been done to death in that den. ¹²³It is the vilest murder-trap on the whole riverside, and I fear that Neville St. Clair has entered it never to leave it more. ¹²⁴But our trap should be here." ¹²⁵He 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.

¹²⁶"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. ¹²⁷"You'll come with me, won't you?"

¹²⁸"If I can be of use."

¹²⁹"Oh, a trusty comrade is always of use; and a chronicler still more so. ¹³⁰My room at The Cedars is a double-bedded one."

¹³¹"The Cedars?"

¹³²"Yes; that is Mr. St. Clair's house. ¹³³I am staying there while I conduct the inquiry."

¹³⁴"Where is it, then?"

¹³⁵"Near Lee, in Kent. ¹³⁶We have a seven-mile drive before us."

¹³⁷"But I am all in the dark."

¹³⁸"Of course you are. ¹³⁹You'll know all about it presently. ¹⁴⁰Jump up here. ¹⁴¹All right, John; we shall not need you. ¹⁴²Here's half a crown. ¹⁴³Look out for me to-morrow, about eleven. ¹⁴⁴Give her her head. ¹⁴⁵So long, then!"

¹⁴⁶He 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. ¹⁴⁷Beyond 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. ¹⁴⁸A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of the clouds. ¹⁴⁹Holmes 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. ¹⁵⁰We 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.

¹⁵¹"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said he. ¹⁵²"It makes you quite invaluable as a companion. ¹⁵³Pon my word, it is a great thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are not over-pleasant. ¹⁵⁴I was wondering what I should say to this dear little woman to-night when she meets me at the door."

¹⁵⁵"You forget that I know nothing about it."

¹⁵⁶"I shall just have time to tell you the facts of the case before we get to Lee. ¹⁵⁷It seems absurdly simple, and yet, somehow I can get nothing to go upon. ¹⁵⁸There's plenty of thread, no doubt, but I can't get the end of it into my hand. ¹⁵⁹Now, I'll state the case clearly and concisely to you, Watson, and maybe you can see a spark where all is dark to me."

¹⁶⁰“Proceed, then.”

¹⁶¹“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. ¹⁶²He took a large villa, laid out the grounds very nicely, and lived generally in good style. ¹⁶³By 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. ¹⁶⁴He 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. ¹⁶⁵Mr. 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. ¹⁶⁶I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far as we have been able to ascertain, amount to £88 10s., while he has £220 standing to his credit in the Capital and Counties Bank. ¹⁶⁷There is no reason, therefore, to think that money troubles have been weighing upon his mind.

¹⁶⁸“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. ¹⁶⁹Now, 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. ¹⁷⁰Now, 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. ¹⁷¹Have you followed me so far?”

¹⁷²“It is very clear.”

¹⁷³“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. ¹⁷⁴While 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. ¹⁷⁵The window was open, and she distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being terribly agitated. ¹⁷⁶He 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. ¹⁷⁷One 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.

¹⁷⁸“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. ¹⁷⁹At 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. ¹⁸⁰Filled 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. ¹⁸¹The 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. ¹⁸²There 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. ¹⁸³Both he and the Lascar stoutly swore that no one else had been in the front room during the afternoon. ¹⁸⁴So 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. ¹⁸⁵Out there fell a cascade of children's bricks. ¹⁸⁶It was the toy which he had promised to bring home.

¹⁸⁷“This discovery, and the evident confusion which the cripple showed, made the inspector realise that the matter was serious. ¹⁸⁸The rooms were carefully examined, and results all pointed to an abominable crime. ¹⁸⁹The 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. ¹⁹⁰Between 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. ¹⁹¹The bedroom window was a broad one and opened from below. ¹⁹²On examination traces of blood were to be seen upon the windowsill, and several scattered drops were visible upon the wooden floor of the bedroom. ¹⁹³Thrust away behind a curtain in the front room were all the clothes of Mr. Neville St. Clair, with the exception of his coat. ¹⁹⁴His boots, his socks, his hat, and his watch—all were there. ¹⁹⁵There were no signs of violence upon any of these garments, and there were no other traces of Mr. Neville St. Clair. ¹⁹⁶Out 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.

¹⁹⁷“And now as to the villains who seemed to be immediately implicated in the matter. ¹⁹⁸The 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. ¹⁹⁹His 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.

²⁰⁰“So much for the Lascar manager. ²⁰¹Now 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. ²⁰²His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. ²⁰³He is a professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas. ²⁰⁴Some little distance down Threadneedle Street, upon the left-hand side, there is, as you may have remarked, a small angle in the wall. ²⁰⁵Here 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. ²⁰⁶I 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. ²⁰⁷His appearance, you see, is so remarkable that no one can pass him without observing him. ²⁰⁸A 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. ²⁰⁹This 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.”

²¹⁰“But a cripple!” said I. ²¹¹“What could he have done single-handed against a man in the prime of life?”

²¹²“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. ²¹³Surely your medical experience would tell you, Watson, that weakness in one limb is often compensated for by exceptional strength in the others.”

²¹⁴“Pray continue your narrative.”

²¹⁵“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. ²¹⁶Inspector 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. ²¹⁷One 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. ²¹⁸There 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. ²¹⁹He 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. ²²⁰As 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. ²²¹He 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.

²²²"And it did, though they hardly found upon the mud-bank what they had feared to find. ²²³It was Neville St. Clair's coat, and not Neville St. Clair, which lay uncovered as the tide receded. ²²⁴And what do you think they found in the pockets?"

²²⁵"I cannot imagine."

²²⁶"No, I don't think you would guess. ²²⁷Every pocket stuffed with pennies and half-pennies—421 pennies and 270 half-pennies. ²²⁸It was no wonder that it had not been swept away by the tide. ²²⁹But a human body is a different matter. ²³⁰There is a fierce eddy between the wharf and the house. ²³¹It seemed likely enough that the weighted coat had remained when the stripped body had been sucked away into the river."

²³²"But I understand that all the other clothes were found in the room. ²³³Would the body be dressed in a coat alone?"

²³⁴"No, sir, but the facts might be met speciously enough. ²³⁵Suppose that this man Boone had thrust Neville St. Clair through the window, there is no human eye which could have seen the deed. ²³⁶What would he do then? ²³⁷It would of course instantly strike him that he must get rid of the tell-tale garments. ²³⁸He 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. ²³⁹He 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. ²⁴⁰There is not an instant to be lost. ²⁴¹He 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. ²⁴²He 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."

²⁴³"It certainly sounds feasible."

²⁴⁴"Well, we will take it as a working hypothesis for want of a better. ²⁴⁵Boone, 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. ²⁴⁶He had for years been known as a professional beggar, but his life appeared to have been a very quiet and innocent one. ²⁴⁷There 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. ²⁴⁸I confess that I cannot recall any case within my experience which looked at the first glance so simple and yet which presented such difficulties."

²⁴⁹While 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. ²⁵⁰Just as he finished, however, we drove through two scattered villages, where a few lights still glimmered in the windows.

²⁵¹“We are on the outskirts of Lee,” said my companion. ²⁵²“We have touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent. ²⁵³See that light among the trees? ²⁵⁴That 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.”

²⁵⁵“But why are you not conducting the case from Baker Street?” I asked.

²⁵⁶“Because there are many inquiries which must be made out here. ²⁵⁷Mrs. 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. ²⁵⁸I hate to meet her, Watson, when I have no news of her husband. ²⁵⁹Here we are. ²⁶⁰Whoa, there, whoa!”

²⁶¹We had pulled up in front of a large villa which stood within its own grounds. ²⁶²A 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. ²⁶³As 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. ²⁶⁴She 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.

²⁶⁵“Well?” she cried, “well?” ²⁶⁶And 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.

²⁶⁷“No good news?”

²⁶⁸“None.”

²⁶⁹“No bad?”

²⁷⁰“No.”

²⁷¹“Thank God for that. ²⁷²But come in. ²⁷³You must be weary, for you have had a long day.”

²⁷⁴“This is my friend, Dr. Watson. ²⁷⁵He 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.”

²⁷⁶“I am delighted to see you,” said she, pressing my hand warmly. ²⁷⁷“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.”

²⁷⁸“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. ²⁷⁹If I can be of any assistance, either to you or to my friend here, I shall be indeed happy.”

²⁸⁰“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.”

²⁸¹“Certainly, madam.”

²⁸²“Do not trouble about my feelings. I am not hysterical, nor given to fainting. ²⁸³I simply wish to hear your real, real opinion.”

²⁸⁴“Upon what point?”

²⁸⁵“In your heart of hearts, do you think that Neville is alive?”

²⁸⁶Sherlock Holmes seemed to be embarrassed by the question. ²⁸⁷“Frankly, now!” she repeated, standing upon the rug and looking keenly down at him as he leaned back in a basket-chair.

²⁸⁸“Frankly, then, madam, I do not.”

²⁸⁹“You think that he is dead?”

²⁹⁰“I do.”

²⁹¹“Murdered?”

²⁹²“I don't say that. ²⁹³Perhaps.”

²⁹⁴“And on what day did he meet his death?”

²⁹⁵“On Monday.”

²⁹⁶“Then perhaps, Mr. Holmes, you will be good enough to explain how it is that I have received a letter from him to-day.”

²⁹⁷Sherlock Holmes sprang out of his chair as if he had been galvanised.

²⁹⁸“What!” he roared.

²⁹⁹“Yes, to-day.” ³⁰⁰She stood smiling, holding up a little slip of paper in the air.

³⁰¹“May I see it?”

³⁰²“Certainly.”

³⁰³He snatched it from her in his eagerness, and smoothing it out upon the table he drew over the lamp and examined it intently. ³⁰⁴I had left my chair and was gazing at it over his shoulder. ³⁰⁵The 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.

³⁰⁶“Coarse writing,” murmured Holmes. ³⁰⁷“Surely this is not your husband's writing, madam.”

³⁰⁸“No, but the enclosure is.”

³⁰⁹“I perceive also that whoever addressed the envelope had to go and inquire as to the address.”

³¹⁰“How can you tell that?”

³¹¹“The name, you see, is in perfectly black ink, which has dried itself. ³¹²The rest is of the greyish colour, which shows that blotting-paper has been used. ³¹³If it had been written straight off, and then blotted, none would be of a deep black shade. ³¹⁴This 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. ³¹⁵It is, of course, a trifle, but there is nothing so important as trifles. ³¹⁶Let us now see the letter. ³¹⁷Ha! there has been an enclosure here!”

³¹⁸“Yes, there was a ring. ³¹⁹His signet-ring.”

³²⁰“And you are sure that this is your husband's hand?”

³²¹“One of his hands.”

³²²“One?”

³²³“His hand when he wrote hurriedly. ³²⁴It is very unlike his usual writing, and yet I know it well.”

³²⁵“Dearest do not be frightened. ³²⁶All will come well. ³²⁷There is a huge error which it may take some little time to rectify. ³²⁸Wait in patience.

³²⁹“Neville.

³³⁰Written in pencil upon the fly-leaf of a book, octavo size, no water-mark. ³³¹Hum! ³³²Posted to-day in Gravesend by a man with a dirty thumb. ³³³Ha! ³³⁴And the flap has been gummed, if I am not very much in error, by a person who had been chewing tobacco. ³³⁵And you have no doubt that it is your husband's hand, madam?”

³³⁶“None. ³³⁷Neville wrote those words.”

³³⁸“And they were posted to-day at Gravesend. ³³⁹Well, Mrs. St. Clair, the clouds lighten, though I should not venture to say that the danger is over.”

³⁴⁰“But he must be alive, Mr. Holmes.”

³⁴¹“Unless this is a clever forgery to put us on the wrong scent. ³⁴²The ring, after all, proves nothing. ³⁴³It may have been taken from him.”

³⁴⁴“No, no; it is, it is his very own writing!”

³⁴⁵“Very well. ³⁴⁶It may, however, have been written on Monday and only posted to-day.”

³⁴⁷“That is possible.”

³⁴⁸“If so, much may have happened between.”

³⁴⁹“Oh, you must not discourage me, Mr. Holmes. ³⁵⁰I know that all is well with him. ³⁵¹There is so keen a sympathy between us that I should know if evil came upon him. ³⁵²On 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. ³⁵³Do you think that I would respond to such a trifle and yet be ignorant of his death?”

³⁵⁴“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. ³⁵⁵And in this letter you certainly have a very strong piece of evidence to corroborate your view. ³⁵⁶But if your husband is alive and able to write letters, why should he remain away from you?”

³⁵⁷“I cannot imagine. ³⁵⁸It is unthinkable.”

³⁵⁹“And on Monday he made no remarks before leaving you?”

³⁶⁰“No.”

³⁶¹“And you were surprised to see him in Swandam Lane?”

³⁶²“Very much so.”

³⁶³“Was the window open?”

³⁶⁴“Yes.”

³⁶⁵“Then he might have called to you?”

³⁶⁶“He might.”

³⁶⁷“He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate cry?”

³⁶⁸“Yes.”

³⁶⁹“A call for help, you thought?”

³⁷⁰“Yes. ³⁷¹He waved his hands.”

³⁷²“But it might have been a cry of surprise. ³⁷³Astonishment at the unexpected sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?”

³⁷⁴“It is possible.”

³⁷⁵“And you thought he was pulled back?”

³⁷⁶“He disappeared so suddenly.”

³⁷⁷“He might have leaped back. ³⁷⁸You did not see anyone else in the room?”

³⁷⁹“No, but this horrible man confessed to having been there, and the Lascar was at the foot of the stairs.”

³⁸⁰“Quite so. ³⁸¹Your husband, as far as you could see, had his ordinary clothes on?”

³⁸²“But without his collar or tie. ³⁸³I distinctly saw his bare throat.”

³⁸⁴“Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?”

³⁸⁵“Never.”

³⁸⁶“Had he ever showed any signs of having taken opium?”

³⁸⁷“Never.”

³⁸⁸“Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. ³⁸⁹Those are the principal points about which I wished to be absolutely clear. ³⁹⁰We shall now have a little supper and then retire, for we may have a very busy day to-morrow.”

³⁹¹A 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. ³⁹²Sherlock 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. ³⁹³It was soon evident to me that he was now preparing for an all-night sitting. ³⁹⁴He 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. ³⁹⁵With 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. ³⁹⁶In 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. ³⁹⁷So 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. ³⁹⁸The 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.

³⁹⁹“Awake, Watson?” he asked.

⁴⁰⁰“Yes.”

⁴⁰¹“Game for a morning drive?”

⁴⁰²“Certainly.”

⁴⁰³“Then dress. ⁴⁰⁴No one is stirring yet, but I know where the stable-boy sleeps, and we shall soon have the trap out.” ⁴⁰⁵He chuckled to himself as he spoke, his eyes twinkled, and he seemed a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous night.

⁴⁰⁶As I dressed I glanced at my watch. ⁴⁰⁷It was no wonder that no one was stirring. ⁴⁰⁸It was twenty-five minutes past four. ⁴⁰⁹I had hardly finished when Holmes returned with the news that the boy was putting in the horse.

⁴¹⁰“I want to test a little theory of mine,” said he, pulling on his boots. ⁴¹¹“I think, Watson, that you are now standing in the presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. ⁴¹²I deserve to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. ⁴¹³But I think I have the key of the affair now.”

⁴¹³“And where is it?” I asked, smiling.

⁴¹⁴“In the bathroom,” he answered. ⁴¹⁵“Oh, yes, I am not joking,” he continued, seeing my look of incredulity. ⁴¹⁶“I have just been there, and I have taken it out, and I have got it in this Gladstone bag. ⁴¹⁷Come on, my boy, and we shall see whether it will not fit the lock.”

⁴¹⁸We made our way downstairs as quietly as possible, and out into the bright morning sunshine. ⁴¹⁹In the road stood our horse and trap, with the half-clad stable-boy waiting at the head. ⁴²⁰We both sprang in, and away we dashed down the London Road. ⁴²¹A 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.

⁴²²“It has been in some points a singular case,” said Holmes, flicking the horse on into a gallop. ⁴²³“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.”

⁴²⁴In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey side. ⁴²⁵Passing 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. ⁴²⁶Sherlock Holmes was well known to the force, and the two constables at the door saluted him. ⁴²⁷One of them held the horse's head while the other led us in.

⁴²⁸“Who is on duty?” asked Holmes.

⁴²⁹“Inspector Bradstreet, sir.”

⁴³⁰“Ah, Bradstreet, how are you?” ⁴³¹A tall, stout official had come down the stone-flagged passage, in a peaked cap and frogged jacket. ⁴³²“I wish to have a quiet word with you, Bradstreet.” ⁴³³“Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Step into my room here.” ⁴³⁴It was a small, office-like room, with a huge ledger upon the table, and a telephone projecting from the wall. ⁴³⁵The inspector sat down at his desk.

⁴³⁶“What can I do for you, Mr. Holmes?”

⁴³⁷“I called about that beggarman, Boone—the one who was charged with being concerned in the disappearance of Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee.”

⁴³⁸“Yes. ⁴³⁹He was brought up and remanded for further inquiries.”

⁴⁴⁰“So I heard. You have him here?”

⁴⁴¹“In the cells.”

⁴⁴²“Is he quiet?”

⁴⁴³“Oh, he gives no trouble. ⁴⁴⁴But he is a dirty scoundrel.”

⁴⁴⁵“Dirty?”

⁴⁴⁶“Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his face is as black as a tinker's. ⁴⁴⁷Well, 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.”

⁴⁴⁸“I should like to see him very much.”

⁴⁴⁹“Would you? ⁴⁵⁰That is easily done. ⁴⁵¹Come this way. ⁴⁵²You can leave your bag.”

⁴⁵³“No, I think that I'll take it.”

⁴⁵⁴“Very good. ⁴⁵⁵Come this way, if you please.” ⁴⁵⁶He 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.

⁴⁵⁷“The third on the right is his,” said the inspector. ⁴⁵⁸“Here it is!” ⁴⁵⁹He quietly shot back a panel in the upper part of the door and glanced through.

⁴⁶⁰“He is asleep,” said he. ⁴⁶¹“You can see him very well.”

⁴⁶²We both put our eyes to the grating. ⁴⁶³The prisoner lay with his face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and heavily. ⁴⁶⁴He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. ⁴⁶⁵He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive ugliness. ⁴⁶⁶A 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. ⁴⁶⁷A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead.

⁴⁶⁸“He's a beauty, isn't he?” said the inspector.

⁴⁶⁹“He certainly needs a wash,” remarked Holmes. ⁴⁷⁰“I had an idea that he might, and I took the liberty of bringing the tools with me.” ⁴⁷¹He opened the Gladstone bag as he spoke, and took out, to my astonishment, a very large bath-sponge.

⁴⁷²“He! he! ⁴⁷³You are a funny one,” chuckled the inspector.

⁴⁷⁴“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.”

⁴⁷⁵“Well, I don't know why not,” said the inspector. ⁴⁷⁶“He doesn't look a credit to the Bow Street cells, does he?” ⁴⁷⁷He slipped his key into the lock, and we all very quietly entered the cell. ⁴⁷⁸The sleeper half turned, and then settled down once more into a deep slumber. ⁴⁷⁹Holmes stooped to the water-jug, moistened his sponge, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner's face.

⁴⁸⁰“Let me introduce you,” he shouted, “to Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee, in the county of Kent.”

⁴⁸¹Never in my life have I seen such a sight. ⁴⁸²The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. ⁴⁸³Gone was the coarse brown tint! ⁴⁸⁴Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! ⁴⁸⁵A 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. ⁴⁸⁶Then suddenly realising the exposure, he broke into a scream and threw himself down with his face to the pillow.

⁴⁸⁷“Great heavens!” cried the inspector, “it is, indeed, the missing man. ⁴⁸⁸I know him from the photograph.”

⁴⁸⁹The prisoner turned with the reckless air of a man who abandons himself to his destiny. ⁴⁹⁰“Be it so,” said he. ⁴⁹¹“And pray what am I charged with?”

⁴⁹²“With making away with Mr. Neville St.— ⁴⁹³Oh, come, you can't be charged with that unless they make a case of attempted suicide of it,” said the inspector with a grin. ⁴⁹⁴“Well, I have been twenty-seven years in the force, but this really takes the cake.”

⁴⁹⁵“If I am Mr. Neville St. Clair, then it is obvious that no crime has been committed, and that, therefore, I am illegally detained.”

⁴⁹⁶“No crime, but a very great error has been committed,” said Holmes. ⁴⁹⁷“You would have done better to have trusted your wife.”

⁴⁹⁸“It was not the wife; it was the children,” groaned the prisoner. ⁴⁹⁹“God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. ⁵⁰⁰My God! ⁵⁰¹What an exposure! ⁵⁰²What can I do?”

⁵⁰³Sherlock Holmes sat down beside him on the couch and patted him kindly on the shoulder.

⁵⁰⁴“If you leave it to a court of law to clear the matter up,” said he, “of course you can hardly avoid publicity. ⁵⁰⁵On 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. ⁵⁰⁶Inspector Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which you might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. ⁵⁰⁷The case would then never go into court at all.”

⁵⁰⁸“God bless you!” cried the prisoner passionately. ⁵⁰⁹“I would have endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left my miserable secret as a family blot to my children.

⁵¹⁰“You are the first who have ever heard my story. ⁵¹¹My father was a schoolmaster in Chesterfield, where I received an excellent education. ⁵¹²I travelled in my youth, took to the stage, and finally became a reporter on an evening paper in London. ⁵¹³One day my editor wished to have a series of articles upon begging in the metropolis, and I volunteered to supply them. ⁵¹⁴There was the point from which all my adventures started. ⁵¹⁵It was only by trying begging as an amateur that I could get the facts upon which to base my articles. ⁵¹⁶When an actor I had, of course, learned all the secrets of making up, and had been famous in the green-room for my skill. ⁵¹⁷I took advantage now of my attainments. ⁵¹⁸I 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. ⁵¹⁹Then 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. ⁵²⁰For 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.

⁵²¹“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. ⁵²²I was at my wit's end where to get the money, but a sudden idea came to me. ⁵²³I 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. ⁵²⁴In ten days I had the money and had paid the debt.

⁵²⁵“Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at £2 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. ⁵²⁶It 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. ⁵²⁷Only one man knew my secret. ⁵²⁸He 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. ⁵²⁹This fellow, a Lascar, was well paid by me for his rooms, so that I knew that my secret was safe in his possession.

⁵³⁰“Well, very soon I found that I was saving considerable sums of money. ⁵³¹I do not mean that any beggar in the streets of London could earn £700 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. ⁵³²All 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.

⁵³³“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. ⁵³⁴My dear wife knew that I had business in the City. ⁵³⁵She little knew what.

⁵³⁶“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. ⁵³⁷I 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. ⁵³⁸I heard her voice downstairs, but I knew that she could not ascend. ⁵³⁹Swiftly I threw off my clothes, pulled on those of a beggar, and put on my pigments and wig. ⁵⁴⁰Even a wife's eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise. ⁵⁴¹But then it occurred to me that there might be a search in the room, and that the clothes might betray me. ⁵⁴²I threw open the window, reopening by my violence a small cut which I had inflicted upon myself in the bedroom that morning. ⁵⁴³Then 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. ⁵⁴⁴I hurled it out of the window, and it disappeared into the Thames. ⁵⁴⁵The 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.

⁵⁴⁶“I do not know that there is anything else for me to explain. ⁵⁴⁷I was determined to preserve my disguise as long as possible, and hence my preference for a dirty face. ⁵⁴⁸Knowing 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.”

⁵⁴⁹“That note only reached her yesterday,” said Holmes.

⁵⁵⁰“Good God! What a week she must have spent!”

⁵⁵¹“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. ⁵⁵²Probably he handed it to some sailor customer of his, who forgot all about it for some days.”

⁵⁵³“That was it,” said Holmes, nodding approvingly; “I have no doubt of it. ⁵⁵⁴But have you never been prosecuted for begging?”

⁵⁵⁵“Many times; but what was a fine to me?”

⁵⁵⁶“It must stop here, however,” said Bradstreet. ⁵⁵⁷“If the police are to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone.”

⁵⁵⁸“I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take.”

⁵⁵⁹“In that case I think that it is probable that no further steps may be taken. ⁵⁶⁰But if you are found again, then all must come out. ⁵⁶¹I am sure, Mr. Holmes, that we are very much indebted to you for having cleared the matter up. ⁵⁶²I wish I knew how you reach your results.”

⁵⁶³“I reached this one,” said my friend, “by sitting upon five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag.

⁵⁶⁴I think, Watson, that if we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast.”

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

¹I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. ²He 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. ³Beside 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. ⁴A 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.

⁵"You are engaged," said I; "perhaps I interrupt you."

⁶"Not at all. ⁷I am glad to have a friend with whom I can discuss my results. ⁸The 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."

⁹I 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. ¹⁰"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."

¹¹"No, no. ¹²No crime," said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. ¹³"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. ¹⁴Amid 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. ¹⁵We have already had experience of such."

¹⁶"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."

¹⁷"Precisely. ¹⁸You 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. ¹⁹Well, I have no doubt that this small matter will fall into the same innocent category. ²⁰You know Peterson, the commissionaire?"

²¹"Yes."

²²"It is to him that this trophy belongs."

²³"It is his hat."

²⁴"No, no, he found it. ²⁵Its owner is unknown. ²⁶I beg that you will look upon it not as a battered billycock but as an intellectual problem. ²⁷And, first, as to how it came here. ²⁸It 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. ²⁹The 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. ³⁰In 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. ³¹As he reached the corner of Goodge Street, a row broke out between this stranger and a little knot of roughs. ³²One 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. ³³Peterson 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. ³⁴The 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.”

³⁵“Which surely he restored to their owner?”

³⁶“My dear fellow, there lies the problem. ³⁷It 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.”

³⁸“What, then, did Peterson do?”

³⁹“He brought round both hat and goose to me on Christmas morning, knowing that even the smallest problems are of interest to me. ⁴⁰The 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. ⁴¹Its 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.”

⁴²“Did he not advertise?”

⁴³“No.”

⁴⁴“Then, what clue could you have as to his identity?”

⁴⁵“Only as much as we can deduce.”

⁴⁶“From his hat?”

⁴⁷“Precisely.”

⁴⁸“But you are joking. ⁴⁹What can you gather from this old battered felt?”

⁵⁰“Here is my lens. ⁵¹You know my methods. ⁵²What can you gather yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this article?”

⁵³I took the tattered object in my hands and turned it over rather ruefully. ⁵⁴It was a very ordinary black hat of the usual round shape, hard and much the worse for wear. ⁵⁵The lining had been of red silk, but was a good deal discoloured. ⁵⁶There was no maker’s name; but, as Holmes had remarked, the initials “H. B.” were scrawled upon one side. ⁵⁷It was pierced in the brim for a hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. ⁵⁸For 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.

⁵⁹“I can see nothing,” said I, handing it back to my friend.

⁶⁰“On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. ⁶¹You fail, however, to reason from what you see.

⁶²You are too timid in drawing your inferences.”

⁶³“Then, pray tell me what it is that you can infer from this hat?”

⁶⁴He picked it up and gazed at it in the peculiar introspective fashion which was characteristic of him.

⁶⁵“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. ⁶⁶That 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. ⁶⁷He 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. ⁶⁸This may account also for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him.”

⁶⁹“My dear Holmes!”

⁷⁰“He has, however, retained some degree of self-respect,” he continued, disregarding my remonstrance.

⁷¹“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.

⁷²These are the more patent facts which are to be deduced from his hat. ⁷³Also, by the way, that it is extremely improbable that he has gas laid on in his house.”

⁷⁴“You are certainly joking, Holmes.”

⁷⁵“Not in the least. ⁷⁶Is it possible that even now, when I give you these results, you are unable to see how they are attained?”

⁷⁷“I have no doubt that I am very stupid, but I must confess that I am unable to follow you. ⁷⁸For example, how did you deduce that this man was intellectual?”

⁷⁹For answer Holmes clapped the hat upon his head. ⁸⁰It came right over the forehead and settled upon the bridge of his nose. ⁸¹“It is a question of cubic capacity,” said he; “a man with so large a brain must have something in it.”

⁸²“The decline of his fortunes, then?”

⁸³“This hat is three years old. ⁸⁴These flat brims curled at the edge came in then. ⁸⁵It is a hat of the very best quality. ⁸⁶Look at the band of ribbed silk and the excellent lining. ⁸⁷If 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.”

⁸⁸“Well, that is clear enough, certainly. ⁸⁹But how about the foresight and the moral retrogression?”

⁹⁰Sherlock Holmes laughed. ⁹¹“Here is the foresight,” said he putting his finger upon the little disc and loop of the hat-securer. ⁹²“They are never sold upon hats. ⁹³If 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. ⁹⁴But 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. ⁹⁵On 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.”

⁹⁶“Your reasoning is certainly plausible.”

⁹⁷“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.

⁹⁸The lens discloses a large number of hair-ends, clean cut by the scissors of the barber. ⁹⁹They all appear to be adhesive, and there is a distinct odour of lime-cream. ¹⁰⁰This 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.”

¹⁰¹“But his wife—you said that she had ceased to love him.”

¹⁰²“This hat has not been brushed for weeks. ¹⁰³When 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.”

¹⁰⁴“But he might be a bachelor.”

¹⁰⁵“Nay, he was bringing home the goose as a peace-offering to his wife. ¹⁰⁶Remember the card upon the bird's leg.”

¹⁰⁷“You have an answer to everything. ¹⁰⁸But how on earth do you deduce that the gas is not laid on in his house?”

¹⁰⁹“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. ¹¹⁰Anyhow, he never got tallow-stains from a gas-jet. ¹¹¹Are you satisfied?”

¹¹²“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.”

¹¹³Sherlock 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.

¹¹⁴“The goose, Mr. Holmes! ¹¹⁵The goose, sir!” he gasped.

¹¹⁶“Eh? ¹¹⁷What of it, then? ¹¹⁸Has it returned to life and flapped off through the kitchen window?”
¹¹⁹Holmes twisted himself round upon the sofa to get a fairer view of the man's excited face.

¹²⁰“See here, sir! ¹²¹See what my wife found in its crop!” ¹²²He 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.

¹²³Sherlock Holmes sat up with a whistle. ¹²⁴“By Jove, Peterson!” said he, “this is treasure trove indeed. ¹²⁵I suppose you know what you have got?”

¹²⁶“A diamond, sir? ¹²⁷A precious stone. ¹²⁸It cuts into glass as though it were putty.”

¹²⁹“It's more than a precious stone. ¹³⁰It is the precious stone.”

¹³¹“Not the Countess of Morcar's blue carbuncle!” I ejaculated.

¹³²“Precisely so. ¹³³I ought to know its size and shape, seeing that I have read the advertisement about it in The Times every day lately. ¹³⁴It is absolutely unique, and its value can only be conjectured, but the reward offered of £1000 is certainly not within a twentieth part of the market price.”

¹³⁵“A thousand pounds! ¹³⁶Great Lord of mercy!” ¹³⁷The commissionaire plumped down into a chair and stared from one to the other of us.

¹³⁸“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.”

¹³⁹“It was lost, if I remember aright, at the Hotel Cosmopolitan,” I remarked.

¹⁴⁰“Precisely so, on December 22nd, just five days ago. ¹⁴¹John Horner, a plumber, was accused of having abstracted it from the lady's jewel-case. ¹⁴²The evidence against him was so strong that the case has been referred to the Assizes. ¹⁴³I have some account of the matter here, I believe.” ¹⁴⁴He rummaged amid his newspapers, glancing over the dates, until at last he smoothed one out, doubled it over, and read the following paragraph:

¹⁴⁵“Hotel Cosmopolitan Jewel Robbery. ¹⁴⁶John 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. ¹⁴⁷James 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. ¹⁴⁸He had remained

with Horner some little time, but had finally been called away. ¹⁴⁹On 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. ¹⁵⁰Ryder 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. ¹⁵¹Catherine 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. ¹⁵²Inspector Bradstreet, B division, gave evidence as to the arrest of Horner, who struggled frantically, and protested his innocence in the strongest terms. ¹⁵³Evidence 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."

¹⁵⁴"Hum! ¹⁵⁵So much for the police-court," said Holmes thoughtfully, tossing aside the paper. ¹⁵⁶"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. ¹⁵⁷You see, Watson, our little deductions have suddenly assumed a much more important and less innocent aspect. ¹⁵⁸Here 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. ¹⁵⁹So now we must set ourselves very seriously to finding this gentleman and ascertaining what part he has played in this little mystery. ¹⁶⁰To do this, we must try the simplest means first, and these lie undoubtedly in an advertisement in all the evening papers. ¹⁶¹If this fail, I shall have recourse to other methods."

¹⁶²"What will you say?"

¹⁶⁴"Give me a pencil and that slip of paper. ¹⁶⁵Now, then: 'Found at the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and a black felt hat. ¹⁶⁶Mr. Henry Baker can have the same by applying at 6.30 this evening at 221b, Baker Street.' ¹⁶⁷That is clear and concise."

¹⁶⁸"Very. ¹⁶⁹But will he see it?"

¹⁷⁰"Well, he is sure to keep an eye on the papers, since, to a poor man, the loss was a heavy one. ¹⁷¹He 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. ¹⁷²Then, again, the introduction of his name will cause him to see it, for everyone who knows him will direct his attention to it. ¹⁷³Here you are, Peterson, run down to the advertising agency and have this put in the evening papers."

¹⁷⁴"In which, sir?"

¹⁷⁵"Oh, in the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James's, Evening News, Standard, Echo, and any others that occur to you."

¹⁷⁶"Very well, sir. ¹⁷⁷And this stone?"

¹⁷⁸"Ah, yes, I shall keep the stone. ¹⁷⁹Thank you. ¹⁸⁰And, 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."

¹⁸¹When the commissionaire had gone, Holmes took up the stone and held it against the light. ¹⁸²"It's a bonny thing," said he. ¹⁸³"Just see how it glints and sparkles. ¹⁸⁴Of course it is a nucleus and focus of crime. ¹⁸⁵Every good stone is. ¹⁸⁶They are the devil's pet baits. ¹⁸⁷In the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a bloody deed. ¹⁸⁸This stone is not yet twenty years old. ¹⁸⁹It 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. ¹⁹⁰In spite of its youth, it has already a sinister history.

¹⁹¹There 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. ¹⁹²Who would think that so pretty a toy would be a purveyor to the gallows and the prison? ¹⁹³I'll lock it up in my strong box now and drop a line to the Countess to say that we have it."

¹⁹⁴"Do you think that this man Horner is innocent?"

¹⁹⁵"I cannot tell."

¹⁹⁶"Well, then, do you imagine that this other one, Henry Baker, had anything to do with the matter?"

¹⁹⁷"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.

¹⁹⁸That, however, I shall determine by a very simple test if we have an answer to our advertisement."

¹⁹⁹"And you can do nothing until then?"

²⁰⁰"Nothing."

²⁰¹"In that case I shall continue my professional round. ²⁰²But 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."

²⁰³"Very glad to see you. ²⁰⁴I dine at seven. ²⁰⁵There is a woodcock, I believe. ²⁰⁶By the way, in view of recent occurrences, perhaps I ought to ask Mrs. Hudson to examine its crop."

²⁰⁷I had been delayed at a case, and it was a little after half-past six when I found myself in Baker Street once more. ²⁰⁸As 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. ²⁰⁹Just as I arrived the door was opened, and we were shown up together to Holmes' room.

²¹⁰"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. ²¹¹"Pray take this chair by the fire, Mr. Baker. ²¹²It is a cold night, and I observe that your circulation is more adapted for summer than for winter. ²¹³Ah, Watson, you have just come at the right time. ²¹⁴Is that your hat, Mr. Baker?"

²¹⁵"Yes, sir, that is undoubtedly my hat."

²¹⁶He was a large man with rounded shoulders, a massive head, and a broad, intelligent face, sloping down to a pointed beard of grizzled brown. ²¹⁷A touch of red in nose and cheeks, with a slight tremor of his extended hand, recalled Holmes' surmise as to his habits. ²¹⁸His 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. ²¹⁹He 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.

²²⁰"We have retained these things for some days," said Holmes, "because we expected to see an advertisement from you giving your address. ²²¹I am at a loss to know now why you did not advertise."

²²²Our visitor gave a rather shamefaced laugh. ²²³"Shillings have not been so plentiful with me as they once were," he remarked. ²²⁴"I had no doubt that the gang of roughs who assaulted me had carried off both my hat and the bird. ²²⁵I did not care to spend more money in a hopeless attempt at recovering them."

²²⁶"Very naturally. ²²⁷By the way, about the bird, we were compelled to eat it."

²²⁸"To eat it!" ²²⁹Our visitor half rose from his chair in his excitement.

²³⁰“Yes, it would have been of no use to anyone had we not done so. ²³¹But I presume that this other goose upon the sideboard, which is about the same weight and perfectly fresh, will answer your purpose equally well?”

²³²“Oh, certainly, certainly,” answered Mr. Baker with a sigh of relief.

²³³“Of course, we still have the feathers, legs, crop, and so on of your own bird, so if you wish—”

²³⁴The man burst into a hearty laugh. ²³⁵“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. ²³⁶No, sir, I think that, with your permission, I will confine my attentions to the excellent bird which I perceive upon the sideboard.”

²³⁷Sherlock Holmes glanced sharply across at me with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

²³⁸“There is your hat, then, and there your bird,” said he. ²³⁹“By the way, would it bore you to tell me where you got the other one from? ²⁴⁰I am somewhat of a fowl fancier, and I have seldom seen a better grown goose.”

²⁴¹“Certainly, sir,” said Baker, who had risen and tucked his newly gained property under his arm. ²⁴²“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. ²⁴³This 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. ²⁴⁴My pence were duly paid, and the rest is familiar to you. ²⁴⁵I am much indebted to you, sir, for a Scotch bonnet is fitted neither to my years nor my gravity.” ²⁴⁶With a comical pomposity of manner he bowed solemnly to both of us and strode off upon his way.

²⁴⁷“So much for Mr. Henry Baker,” said Holmes when he had closed the door behind him. ²⁴⁸“It is quite certain that he knows nothing whatever about the matter. ²⁴⁹Are you hungry, Watson?”

²⁵⁰“Not particularly.”

²⁵¹“Then I suggest that we turn our dinner into a supper and follow up this clue while it is still hot.”

²⁵²“By all means.”

²⁵³It was a bitter night, so we drew on our ulsters and wrapped cravats about our throats. ²⁵⁴Outside, 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. ²⁵⁵Our 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. ²⁵⁶In 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. ²⁵⁷Holmes pushed open the door of the private bar and ordered two glasses of beer from the ruddy-faced, white-aproned landlord.

²⁵⁸“Your beer should be excellent if it is as good as your geese,” said he.

²⁵⁹“My geese!” ²⁶⁰The man seemed surprised.

²⁶¹“Yes. ²⁶²I was speaking only half an hour ago to Mr. Henry Baker, who was a member of your goose club.”

²⁶³“Ah! yes, I see. ²⁶⁴But you see, sir, them's not our geese.”

²⁶⁵“Indeed! ²⁶⁶Whose, then?”

²⁶⁷“Well, I got the two dozen from a salesman in Covent Garden.”

²⁶⁸“Indeed? ²⁶⁹I know some of them. ²⁷⁰Which was it?”

²⁷¹“Breckinridge is his name.”

²⁷²“Ah! ²⁷³I don't know him. ²⁷⁴Well, here's your good health landlord, and prosperity to your house. ²⁷⁵Good-night.”

²⁷⁶“Now for Mr. Breckinridge,” he continued, buttoning up his coat as we came out into the frosty air. ²⁷⁷“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. ²⁷⁸It 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. ²⁷⁹Let us follow it out to the bitter end. ²⁸⁰Faces to the south, then, and quick march!”

²⁸¹We passed across Holborn, down Endell Street, and so through a zigzag of slums to Covent Garden Market. ²⁸²One 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.

²⁸³“Good-evening. ²⁸⁴It's a cold night,” said Holmes.

²⁸⁵The salesman nodded and shot a questioning glance at my companion.

²⁸⁶“Sold out of geese, I see,” continued Holmes, pointing at the bare slabs of marble.

²⁸⁷“Let you have five hundred to-morrow morning.”

²⁸⁸“That's no good.”

²⁸⁹“Well, there are some on the stall with the gas-flare.”

²⁹⁰“Ah, but I was recommended to you.”

²⁹¹“Who by?”

²⁹²“The landlord of the Alpha.”

²⁹³“Oh, yes; I sent him a couple of dozen.”

²⁹⁴“Fine birds they were, too. ²⁹⁵Now where did you get them from?”

²⁹⁶To my surprise the question provoked a burst of anger from the salesman.

²⁹⁷“Now, then, mister,” said he, with his head cocked and his arms akimbo, “what are you driving at?

²⁹⁸Let's have it straight, now.”

²⁹⁹“It is straight enough. ³⁰⁰I should like to know who sold you the geese which you supplied to the Alpha.”

³⁰¹“Well then, I shan't tell you. ³⁰²So now!”

³⁰³“Oh, it is a matter of no importance; but I don't know why you should be so warm over such a trifle.”

³⁰⁴“Warm! ³⁰⁵You'd be as warm, maybe, if you were as pestered as I am. ³⁰⁶When 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?’ ³⁰⁷One would think they were the only geese in the world, to hear the fuss that is made over them.”

³⁰⁸“Well, I have no connection with any other people who have been making inquiries,” said Holmes carelessly. ³⁰⁹“If you won't tell us the bet is off, that is all. ³¹⁰But 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.”

³¹¹“Well, then, you've lost your fiver, for it's town bred,” snapped the salesman.

³¹²“It's nothing of the kind.”

³¹³“I say it is.”

³¹⁴“I don't believe it.”

³¹⁵“D'you think you know more about fowls than I, who have handled them ever since I was a nipper?

³¹⁶I tell you, all those birds that went to the Alpha were town bred.”

³¹⁷“You'll never persuade me to believe that.”

³¹⁸“Will you bet, then?”

³¹⁹“It's merely taking your money, for I know that I am right. ³²⁰But I'll have a sovereign on with you, just to teach you not to be obstinate.”

³²¹The salesman chuckled grimly. ³²²“Bring me the books, Bill,” said he.

³²³The small boy brought round a small thin volume and a great greasy-backed one, laying them out together beneath the hanging lamp.

³²⁴“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. ³²⁵You see this little book?”

³²⁶“Well?”

³²⁷“That's the list of the folk from whom I buy. ³²⁸D'you see? ³²⁹Well, then, here on this page are the country folk, and the numbers after their names are where their accounts are in the big ledger. ³³⁰Now, then! ³³¹You see this other page in red ink? ³³²Well, that is a list of my town suppliers. ³³³Now, look at that third name. ³³⁴Just read it out to me.”

³³⁵“Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road—249,” read Holmes.

³³⁶“Quite so. ³³⁷Now turn that up in the ledger.”

³³⁸Holmes turned to the page indicated. ³³⁹“Here you are, ‘Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier.’”

³⁴⁰“Now, then, what's the last entry?”

³⁴¹“December 22nd. ³⁴²Twenty-four geese at 7s. 6d.”

³⁴³“Quite so. ³⁴⁴There you are. ³⁴⁵And underneath?”

³⁴⁶“Sold to Mr. Windigate of the Alpha, at 12s.”

³⁴⁷“What have you to say now?”

³⁴⁸Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. ³⁴⁹He 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. ³⁵⁰A few yards off he stopped under a lamp-post and laughed in the hearty, noiseless fashion which was peculiar to him.

³⁵¹“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. ³⁵²“I daresay that if I had put £100 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. ³⁵³Well, 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. ³⁵⁴It is clear from what that surly fellow said that there are others besides ourselves who are anxious about the matter, and I should—”

³⁵⁵His remarks were suddenly cut short by a loud hubbub which broke out from the stall which we had just left. ³⁵⁶Turning 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.

³⁵⁷“I’ve had enough of you and your geese,” he shouted. ³⁵⁸“I wish you were all at the devil together. ³⁵⁹If you come pestering me any more with your silly talk I’ll set the dog at you. ³⁶⁰You bring Mrs. Oakshott here and I’ll answer her, but what have you to do with it? ³⁶¹Did I buy the geese off you?”

³⁶²“No; but one of them was mine all the same,” whined the little man.

³⁶³“Well, then, ask Mrs. Oakshott for it.”

³⁶⁴“She told me to ask you.”

³⁶⁵“Well, you can ask the King of Proosia, for all I care. ³⁶⁶I’ve had enough of it. ³⁶⁷Get out of this!” ³⁶⁸He rushed fiercely forward, and the inquirer flitted away into the darkness.

³⁶⁹“Ha! this may save us a visit to Brixton Road,” whispered Holmes. ³⁷⁰“Come with me, and we will see what is to be made of this fellow.” ³⁷¹Striding 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. ³⁷²He sprang round, and I could see in the gas-light that every vestige of colour had been driven from his face.

³⁷³“Who are you, then? ³⁷⁴What do you want?” he asked in a quavering voice.

³⁷⁵“You will excuse me,” said Holmes blandly, “but I could not help overhearing the questions which you put to the salesman just now. ³⁷⁶I think that I could be of assistance to you.”

³⁷⁷“You? ³⁷⁸Who are you? ³⁷⁹How could you know anything of the matter?”

³⁸⁰“My name is Sherlock Holmes. ³⁸¹It is my business to know what other people don’t know.”

³⁸²“But you can know nothing of this?”

³⁸³“Excuse me, I know everything of it. ³⁸⁴You 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.”

³⁸⁵“Oh, sir, you are the very man whom I have longed to meet,” cried the little fellow with outstretched hands and quivering fingers. ³⁸⁶“I can hardly explain to you how interested I am in this matter.”

³⁸⁷Sherlock Holmes hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. ³⁸⁸“In that case we had better discuss it in a cosy room rather than in this wind-swept market-place,” said he. ³⁸⁹“But pray tell me, before we go farther, who it is that I have the pleasure of assisting.”

³⁹⁰The man hesitated for an instant. ³⁹¹“My name is John Robinson,” he answered with a sidelong glance.

³⁹²“No, no; the real name,” said Holmes sweetly. ³⁹³“It is always awkward doing business with an alias.”

³⁹⁴A flush sprang to the white cheeks of the stranger. ³⁹⁵“Well then,” said he, “my real name is James Ryder.”

³⁹⁶“Precisely so. ³⁹⁷Head attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan. ³⁹⁸Pray step into the cab, and I shall soon be able to tell you everything which you would wish to know.”

³⁹⁹The 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. ⁴⁰⁰Then he stepped into the cab, and in half an hour we were back in the sitting-room at Baker Street. ⁴⁰¹Nothing 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.

⁴⁰²"Here we are!" said Holmes cheerily as we filed into the room. ⁴⁰³"The fire looks very seasonable in this weather. ⁴⁰⁴You look cold, Mr. Ryder. Pray take the basket-chair. ⁴⁰⁵I will just put on my slippers before we settle this little matter of yours. ⁴⁰⁶Now, then! ⁴⁰⁷You want to know what became of those geese?"

⁴⁰⁸"Yes, sir."

⁴⁰⁹"Or rather, I fancy, of that goose. ⁴¹⁰It was one bird, I imagine in which you were interested—white, with a black bar across the tail."

⁴¹¹Ryder quivered with emotion. ⁴¹²"Oh, sir," he cried, "can you tell me where it went to?"

⁴¹³"It came here."

⁴¹⁴"Here?"

⁴¹⁵"Yes, and a most remarkable bird it proved. ⁴¹⁶I don't wonder that you should take an interest in it. ⁴¹⁷It laid an egg after it was dead—the bonniest, brightest little blue egg that ever was seen. ⁴¹⁸I have it here in my museum."

⁴¹⁹Our visitor staggered to his feet and clutched the mantelpiece with his right hand. ⁴²⁰Holmes unlocked his strong-box and held up the blue carbuncle, which shone out like a star, with a cold, brilliant, many-pointed radiance. ⁴²¹Ryder stood glaring with a drawn face, uncertain whether to claim or to disown it.

⁴²²"The game's up, Ryder," said Holmes quietly. ⁴²³"Hold up, man, or you'll be into the fire! ⁴²⁴Give him an arm back into his chair, Watson. ⁴²⁵He's not got blood enough to go in for felony with impunity. ⁴²⁶Give him a dash of brandy. ⁴²⁷So! ⁴²⁸Now he looks a little more human. ⁴²⁹What a shrimp it is, to be sure!"

⁴³⁰For 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.

⁴³¹"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. ⁴³²Still, that little may as well be cleared up to make the case complete. ⁴³³You had heard, Ryder, of this blue stone of the Countess of Morcar's?"

⁴³⁴"It was Catherine Cusack who told me of it," said he in a crackling voice.

⁴³⁵"I see—her ladyship's waiting-maid. ⁴³⁶Well, 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. ⁴³⁷It seems to me, Ryder, that there is the making of a very pretty villain in you. ⁴³⁸You 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. ⁴³⁹What did you do, then? ⁴⁴⁰You 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. ⁴⁴¹Then, when he had left, you rifled the jewel-case, raised the alarm, and had this unfortunate man arrested. ⁴⁴²You then—"

⁴⁴³Ryder threw himself down suddenly upon the rug and clutched at my companion's knees. ⁴⁴⁴"For God's sake, have mercy!" he shrieked. ⁴⁴⁵"Think of my father! ⁴⁴⁶Of my mother! ⁴⁴⁷It would break their

hearts. ⁴⁴⁸I never went wrong before! ⁴⁴⁹I never will again. ⁴⁵⁰I swear it. ⁴⁵¹I'll swear it on a Bible. ⁴⁵²Oh, don't bring it into court! ⁴⁵³For Christ's sake, don't!"

⁴⁵⁴"Get back into your chair!" said Holmes sternly. ⁴⁵⁵"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."

⁴⁵⁶"I will fly, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁵⁷I will leave the country, sir. ⁴⁵⁸Then the charge against him will break down."

⁴⁵⁹"Hum! ⁴⁶⁰We will talk about that. ⁴⁶¹And now let us hear a true account of the next act. ⁴⁶²How came the stone into the goose, and how came the goose into the open market? ⁴⁶³Tell us the truth, for there lies your only hope of safety."

⁴⁶⁴Ryder passed his tongue over his parched lips. ⁴⁶⁵"I will tell you it just as it happened, sir," said he. ⁴⁶⁶"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. ⁴⁶⁷There was no place about the hotel where it would be safe. ⁴⁶⁸I went out, as if on some commission, and I made for my sister's house. ⁴⁶⁹She had married a man named Oakshott, and lived in Brixton Road, where she fattened fowls for the market. ⁴⁷⁰All 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. ⁴⁷¹My 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. ⁴⁷²Then I went into the back yard and smoked a pipe and wondered what it would be best to do.

⁴⁷³"I had a friend once called Maudsley, who went to the bad, and has just been serving his time in Pentonville. ⁴⁷⁴One day he had met me, and fell into talk about the ways of thieves, and how they could get rid of what they stole. ⁴⁷⁵I 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. ⁴⁷⁶He would show me how to turn the stone into money. ⁴⁷⁷But how to get to him in safety? ⁴⁷⁸I thought of the agonies I had gone through in coming from the hotel. ⁴⁷⁹I might at any moment be seized and searched, and there would be the stone in my waistcoat pocket. ⁴⁸⁰I 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.

⁴⁸¹"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. ⁴⁸²I would take my goose now, and in it I would carry my stone to Kilburn. ⁴⁸³There 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. ⁴⁸⁴I caught it, and prying its bill open, I thrust the stone down its throat as far as my finger could reach. ⁴⁸⁵The bird gave a gulp, and I felt the stone pass along its gullet and down into its crop. ⁴⁸⁶But the creature flapped and struggled, and out came my sister to know what was the matter. ⁴⁸⁷As I turned to speak to her the brute broke loose and fluttered off among the others.

⁴⁸⁸"‘Whatever were you doing with that bird, Jem?’ says she.

⁴⁸⁹"‘Well,’ said I, ‘you said you'd give me one for Christmas, and I was feeling which was the fattest.’

⁴⁹⁰"‘Oh,’ says she, ‘we've set yours aside for you—Jem's bird, we call it. ⁴⁹¹It's the big white one over yonder. ⁴⁹²There's twenty-six of them, which makes one for you, and one for us, and two dozen for the market.’

⁴⁹³"‘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.’

⁴⁹⁴"‘The other is a good three pound heavier,’ said she, ‘and we fattened it expressly for you.’

⁴⁹⁵“Never mind. ⁴⁹⁶I'll have the other, and I'll take it now,” said I.

⁴⁹⁷“Oh, just as you like,” said she, a little huffed. ⁴⁹⁸“Which is it you want, then?”

⁴⁹⁹“That white one with the barred tail, right in the middle of the flock.”

⁵⁰⁰“Oh, very well. ⁵⁰¹Kill it and take it with you.”

⁵⁰²“Well, I did what she said, Mr. Holmes, and I carried the bird all the way to Kilburn. ⁵⁰³I told my pal what I had done, for he was a man that it was easy to tell a thing like that to. ⁵⁰⁴He laughed until he choked, and we got a knife and opened the goose. ⁵⁰⁵My heart turned to water, for there was no sign of the stone, and I knew that some terrible mistake had occurred. ⁵⁰⁶I left the bird, rushed back to my sister's, and hurried into the back yard. ⁵⁰⁷There was not a bird to be seen there.

⁵⁰⁸“Where are they all, Maggie?” I cried.

⁵⁰⁹“Gone to the dealer's, Jem.”

⁵¹⁰“Which dealer's?”

⁵¹¹“Breckinridge, of Covent Garden.”

⁵¹²“But was there another with a barred tail?” I asked, ‘the same as the one I chose?’

⁵¹³“Yes, Jem; there were two barred-tailed ones, and I could never tell them apart.”

⁵¹⁴“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. ⁵¹⁵You heard him yourselves to-night. ⁵¹⁶Well, he has always answered me like that. ⁵¹⁷My sister thinks that I am going mad. ⁵¹⁸Sometimes I think that I am myself. ⁵¹⁹And now—and now I am myself a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth for which I sold my character. ⁵²⁰God help me! ⁵²¹God help me!” ⁵²²He burst into convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands.

⁵²³There 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. ⁵²⁴Then my friend rose and threw open the door.

⁵²⁵“Get out!” said he.

⁵²⁶“What, sir! ⁵²⁷Oh, Heaven bless you!”

⁵²⁸“No more words. ⁵²⁹Get out!”

⁵³⁰And no more words were needed. ⁵³¹There was a rush, a clatter upon the stairs, the bang of a door, and the crisp rattle of running footfalls from the street.

⁵³²“After all, Watson,” said Holmes, reaching up his hand for his clay pipe, “I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. ⁵³³If Horner were in danger it would be another thing; but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must collapse. ⁵³⁴I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. ⁵³⁵This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. ⁵³⁶Send him to jail now, and you make him a jail-bird for life. ⁵³⁷Besides, it is the season of forgiveness. ⁵³⁸Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward. ⁵³⁹If 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.”

The Adventure of the Speckled Band

¹On 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. ²Of 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. ³The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. ⁴It 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. ⁵It 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.

⁶It 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. ⁷He 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.

⁸"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the common lot this morning. ⁹Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you."

¹⁰"What is it, then—a fire?"

¹¹"No; a client. ¹²It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. ¹³She is waiting now in the sitting-room. ¹⁴Now, 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. ¹⁵Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. ¹⁶I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance."

¹⁷"My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything."

¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. ²⁰A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

²¹"Good-morning, madam," said Holmes cheerily. ²²"My name is Sherlock Holmes. ²³This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. ²⁴Ha! ²⁵I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. ²⁶Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering."

²⁷"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

²⁸"What, then?"

²⁹"It is fear, Mr. Holmes. ³⁰It is terror." ³¹She 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. ³²Her 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. ³³Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

³⁴“You must not fear,” said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. ³⁵“We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. ³⁶You have come in by train this morning, I see.”

³⁷“You know me, then?”

³⁸“No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. ³⁹You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station.”

⁴⁰The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

⁴¹“There is no mystery, my dear madam,” said he, smiling. ⁴²“The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. ⁴³The marks are perfectly fresh. ⁴⁴There 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.”

⁴⁵“Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct,” said she. ⁴⁶“I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. ⁴⁷Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. ⁴⁸I have no one to turn to—none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. ⁴⁹I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. ⁵⁰It was from her that I had your address. ⁵¹Oh, 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? ⁵²At 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.”

⁵³Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

⁵⁴“Farintosh,” said he. ⁵⁵“Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. ⁵⁶I think it was before your time, Watson. ⁵⁷I 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. ⁵⁸As 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. ⁵⁹And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter.”

⁶⁰“Alas!” replied our visitor, “the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions 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. ⁶¹He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. ⁶²But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. ⁶³You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me.”

⁶⁴“I am all attention, madam.”

⁶⁵“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 Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey.”

⁶⁶Holmes nodded his head. ⁶⁷“The name is familiar to me,” said he.

⁶⁸“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. ⁶⁹In 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. ⁷⁰Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. ⁷¹The 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. ⁷²In 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. ⁷³As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

⁷⁴“When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. ⁷⁵My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's re-marriage. ⁷⁶She had a considerable sum of money—not less than £1000 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. ⁷⁷Shortly after our return to England my mother died—she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. ⁷⁸Dr. 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. ⁷⁹The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

⁸⁰“But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. ⁸¹Instead 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. ⁸²Violence 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. ⁸³A 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.

⁸⁴“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. ⁸⁵He had no friends at all save the wandering gypsies, 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. ⁸⁶He 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.

⁸⁷“You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. ⁸⁸No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. ⁸⁹She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has.”

⁹⁰“Your sister is dead, then?”

⁹¹“She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. ⁹²You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. ⁹³We 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. ⁹⁴Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. ⁹⁵My 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.”

⁹⁶Sherlock 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.

⁹⁷“Pray be precise as to details,” said he.

⁹⁸“It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. ⁹⁹The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. ¹⁰⁰The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. ¹⁰¹Of these bedrooms the first is Dr. Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third my own. ¹⁰²There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. ¹⁰³Do I make myself plain?”

¹⁰⁴“Perfectly so.”

¹⁰⁵“The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. ¹⁰⁶That 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. ¹⁰⁷She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. ¹⁰⁸At eleven o'clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

¹⁰⁹“‘Tell me, Helen,’ said she, ‘have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?’

¹¹⁰“‘Never,’ said I.

¹¹¹“‘I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?’

¹¹²“‘Certainly not. ¹¹³But why?’

¹¹⁴“‘Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. ¹¹⁵I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. ¹¹⁶I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. ¹¹⁷I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.’

¹¹⁸“‘No, I have not. ¹¹⁹It must be those wretched gipsies in the plantation.’

¹²⁰“‘Very likely. ¹²¹And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.’

¹²²“‘Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.’

¹²³“‘Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.’ ¹²⁴She smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock.”

¹²⁵“Indeed,” said Holmes. ¹²⁶“Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?”

¹²⁷“Always.”

¹²⁸“And why?”

¹²⁹“I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. ¹³⁰We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked.”

¹³¹“Quite so. ¹³²Pray proceed with your statement.”

¹³³“I could not sleep that night. ¹³⁴A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. ¹³⁵My 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. ¹³⁶It was a wild night. ¹³⁷The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. ¹³⁸Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. ¹³⁹I knew that it was my sister's voice. ¹⁴⁰I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. ¹⁴¹As 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. ¹⁴²As I ran down the passage, my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. ¹⁴³I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. ¹⁴⁴By 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. ¹⁴⁵I 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. ¹⁴⁶She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. ¹⁴⁷At 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! ¹⁴⁸Helen! ¹⁴⁹It was the band! ¹⁵⁰The speckled band!’ ¹⁵¹There 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. ¹⁵²I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. ¹⁵³When 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. ¹⁵⁴Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister.”

¹⁵⁵“One moment,” said Holmes, “are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? ¹⁵⁶Could you swear to it?”

¹⁵⁷“That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. ¹⁵⁸It 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.”

¹⁵⁹“Was your sister dressed?”

¹⁶⁰“No, she was in her night-dress. ¹⁶¹In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box.”

¹⁶²“Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. ¹⁶³That is important. ¹⁶⁴And what conclusions did the coroner come to?”

¹⁶⁵“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. ¹⁶⁶My 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. ¹⁶⁷The walls were carefully sounded, and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. ¹⁶⁸The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. ¹⁶⁹It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. ¹⁷⁰Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her.”

¹⁷¹“How about poison?”

¹⁷²“The doctors examined her for it, but without success.”

¹⁷³“What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?”

¹⁷⁴“It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine.”

¹⁷⁵“Were there gipsies in the plantation at the time?”

¹⁷⁶“Yes, there are nearly always some there.”

¹⁷⁷“Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band—a speckled band?”

¹⁷⁸“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. ¹⁷⁹I 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.”

¹⁸⁰Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

¹⁸¹“These are very deep waters,” said he; “pray go on with your narrative.”

¹⁸²“Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. ¹⁸³A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. ¹⁸⁴His name is Armitage—Percy Armitage—the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. ¹⁸⁵My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. ¹⁸⁶Two 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. ¹⁸⁷Imagine, 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. ¹⁸⁸I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. ¹⁸⁹I 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.”

¹⁹⁰“You have done wisely,” said my friend. ¹⁹¹“But have you told me all?”

¹⁹²“Yes, all.”

¹⁹³“Miss Roylott, you have not. ¹⁹⁴You are screening your stepfather.”

¹⁹⁵“Why, what do you mean?”

¹⁹⁶For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor's knee. ¹⁹⁷Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

¹⁹⁸“You have been cruelly used,” said Holmes.

¹⁹⁹The lady coloured deeply and covered over her injured wrist. ²⁰⁰“He is a hard man,” she said, “and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength.”

²⁰¹There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

²⁰²“This is a very deep business,” he said at last. ²⁰³“There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide upon our course of action. ²⁰⁴Yet we have not a moment to lose. ²⁰⁵If 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?”

²⁰⁶“As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. ²⁰⁷It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. ²⁰⁸We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way.”

²⁰⁹“Excellent. ²¹⁰You are not averse to this trip, Watson?”

²¹¹“By no means.”

²¹²“Then we shall both come. ²¹³What are you going to do yourself?”

²¹⁴“I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. ²¹⁵But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming.”

²¹⁶“And you may expect us early in the afternoon. ²¹⁷I have myself some small business matters to attend to. ²¹⁸Will you not wait and breakfast?”

²¹⁹“No, I must go. ²²⁰My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. ²²¹I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon.” ²²²She dropped her thick black veil over her face and glided from the room.

²²³“And what do you think of it all, Watson?” asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

²²⁴“It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business.”

²²⁵“Dark enough and sinister enough.”

²²⁶“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.”

²²⁷“What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?”

²²⁸“I cannot think.”

²²⁹“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.”

²³⁰“But what, then, did the gipsies do?”

²³¹“I cannot imagine.”

²³²“I see many objections to any such theory.”

²³³“And so do I. ²³⁴It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. ²³⁵I want to see whether the objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. ²³⁶But what in the name of the devil!”

²³⁷The 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. ²³⁸His 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. ²³⁹So 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. ²⁴⁰A 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.

²⁴¹“Which of you is Holmes?” asked this apparition.

²⁴²“My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me,” said my companion quietly.

²⁴³“I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran.”

²⁴⁴“Indeed, Doctor,” said Holmes blandly. ²⁴⁵“Pray take a seat.”

²⁴⁶“I will do nothing of the kind. ²⁴⁷My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. ²⁴⁸What has she been saying to you?”

²⁴⁹“It is a little cold for the time of the year,” said Holmes.

²⁵⁰“What has she been saying to you?” screamed the old man furiously.

²⁵¹“But I have heard that the crocuses promise well,” continued my companion imperturbably.

²⁵²“Ha! ²⁵³You put me off, do you?” said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. ²⁵⁴“I know you, you scoundrel! ²⁵⁵I have heard of you before. ²⁵⁶You are Holmes, the meddler.”

²⁵⁷My friend smiled.

²⁵⁸“Holmes, the busybody!”

²⁵⁹His smile broadened.

²⁶⁰“Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!”

²⁶¹Holmes chuckled heartily. ²⁶²“Your conversation is most entertaining,” said he. ²⁶³“When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught.”

²⁶⁴“I will go when I have said my say. ²⁶⁵Don't you dare to meddle with my affairs. ²⁶⁶I know that Miss Stoner has been here. ²⁶⁷I traced her! ²⁶⁸I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! ²⁶⁹See here.” ²⁷⁰He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

²⁷¹“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.

²⁷²“He seems a very amiable person,” said Holmes, laughing. ²⁷³“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.” ²⁷⁴As he spoke he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort, straightened it out again.

²⁷⁵“Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! ²⁷⁶This 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. ²⁷⁷And 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.”

²⁷⁸It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. ²⁷⁹He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

²⁸⁰“I have seen the will of the deceased wife,” said he. ²⁸¹“To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. ²⁸²The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of £1100, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than £750. ²⁸³Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. ²⁸⁴It 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. ²⁸⁵My 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. ²⁸⁶And 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. ²⁸⁷I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. ²⁸⁸An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. ²⁸⁹That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need.”

²⁹⁰At 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. ²⁹¹It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. ²⁹²The 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. ²⁹³To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. ²⁹⁴My 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. ²⁹⁵Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

²⁹⁶“Look there!” said he.

²⁹⁷A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point.

²⁹⁸From amid the branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

²⁹⁹“Stoke Moran?” said he.

³⁰⁰“Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott,” remarked the driver.

³⁰¹“There is some building going on there,” said Holmes; “that is where we are going.”

³⁰²“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. ³⁰³There it is, where the lady is walking.”

³⁰⁴“And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner,” observed Holmes, shading his eyes. ³⁰⁵“Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest.”

³⁰⁶We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

³⁰⁷“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. ³⁰⁸It may stop his gossip. ³⁰⁹Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. ³¹⁰You see that we have been as good as our word.”

³¹¹Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. ³¹²“I have been waiting so eagerly for you,” she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. ³¹³“All has turned out splendidly. ³¹⁴Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening.”

³¹⁵“We have had the pleasure of making the doctor's acquaintance,” said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. ³¹⁶Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

³¹⁷“Good heavens!” she cried, “he has followed me, then.”

³¹⁸“So it appears.”

³¹⁹“He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. ³²⁰What will he say when he returns?”

³²¹“He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. ³²²You must lock yourself up from him to-night. ³²³If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt's at Harrow. ³²⁴Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine.”

³²⁵The 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. ³²⁶In one of these wings the windows were broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. ³²⁷The 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. ³²⁸Some 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. ³²⁹Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

³³⁰“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?”

³³¹“Exactly so. ³³²But I am now sleeping in the middle one.”

³³³“Pending the alterations, as I understand. ³³⁴By the way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall.”

³³⁵“There were none. ³³⁶I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room.”

³³⁷“Ah! that is suggestive. ³³⁸Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. ³³⁹There are windows in it, of course?”

³⁴⁰“Yes, but very small ones. ³⁴¹Too narrow for anyone to pass through.”

³⁴²“As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. ³⁴³Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters?”

³⁴⁴Miss 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. ³⁴⁵There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. ³⁴⁶Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. ³⁴⁷“Hum!” said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, “my theory certainly presents some difficulties. ³⁴⁸No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. ³⁴⁹Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter.”

³⁵⁰A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. ³⁵¹Holmes 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. ³⁵²It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. ³⁵³A 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. ³⁵⁴These 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. ³⁵⁵The 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. ³⁵⁶Holmes 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.

³⁵⁷“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.

³⁵⁸“It goes to the housekeeper's room.”

³⁵⁹“It looks newer than the other things?”

³⁶⁰“Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago.”

³⁶¹“Your sister asked for it, I suppose?”

³⁶²“No, I never heard of her using it. ³⁶³We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves.”

³⁶⁴“Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. ³⁶⁵You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor.” ³⁶⁶He 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.

³⁶⁷Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. ³⁶⁸Finally he walked over to the bed and spent some time in staring at it and in running his eye up and down the wall. ³⁶⁹Finally he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

³⁷⁰“Why, it's a dummy,” said he.

³⁷¹“Won't it ring?”

³⁷²“No, it is not even attached to a wire. ³⁷³This is very interesting. ³⁷⁴You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is.”

³⁷⁵“How very absurd! ³⁷⁶I never noticed that before.”

³⁷⁷“Very strange!” muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. ³⁷⁸“There are one or two very singular points about this room. ³⁷⁹For 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!”

³⁸⁰“That is also quite modern,” said the lady.

³⁸¹“Done about the same time as the bell-rope?” remarked Holmes.

³⁸²“Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time.”

³⁸³“They seem to have been of a most interesting character—dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. ³⁸⁴With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment.”

³⁸⁵Dr. Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. ³⁸⁶A 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. ³⁸⁷Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

³⁸⁸“What's in here?” he asked, tapping the safe.

³⁸⁹“My stepfather's business papers.”

³⁹⁰“Oh! you have seen inside, then?”

³⁹¹“Only once, some years ago. ³⁹²I remember that it was full of papers.”

³⁹³“There isn't a cat in it, for example?”

³⁹⁴“No. ³⁹⁵What a strange idea!”

³⁹⁶“Well, look at this!” ³⁹⁷He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.

³⁹⁸“No; we don't keep a cat. ³⁹⁹But there is a cheetah and a baboon.”

⁴⁰⁰“Ah, yes, of course! ⁴⁰¹Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I daresay. ⁴⁰²There is one point which I should wish to determine.” ⁴⁰³He squatted down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.

⁴⁰⁴“Thank you. ⁴⁰⁵That is quite settled,” said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. ⁴⁰⁶“Hullo! ⁴⁰⁷Here is something interesting!”

⁴⁰⁸The object which had caught his eye was a small dog lash hung on one corner of the bed. ⁴⁰⁹The lash, however, was curled upon itself and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

⁴¹⁰“What do you make of that, Watson?”

⁴¹¹“It's a common enough lash. ⁴¹²But I don't know why it should be tied.”

⁴¹³“That is not quite so common, is it? ⁴¹⁴Ah, me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all. ⁴¹⁵I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn.”

⁴¹⁶I 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. ⁴¹⁷We 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.

⁴¹⁸“It is very essential, Miss Stoner,” said he, “that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect.”

⁴¹⁹“I shall most certainly do so.”

⁴²⁰“The matter is too serious for any hesitation. ⁴²¹Your life may depend upon your compliance.”

⁴²²“I assure you that I am in your hands.”

⁴²³“In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room.”

⁴²⁴Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

⁴²⁵“Yes, it must be so. ⁴²⁶Let me explain. ⁴²⁷I believe that that is the village inn over there?”

⁴²⁸“Yes, that is the Crown.”

⁴²⁹“Very good. ⁴³⁰Your windows would be visible from there?”

⁴³¹“Certainly.”

⁴³²“You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. ⁴³³Then 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. ⁴³⁴I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night.”

⁴³⁵“Oh, yes, easily.”

⁴³⁶“The rest you will leave in our hands.”

⁴³⁷“But what will you do?”

⁴³⁸“We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you.”

⁴³⁹“I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind,” said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion's sleeve.

⁴⁴⁰“Perhaps I have.”

⁴⁴¹“Then, for pity's sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister's death.”

⁴⁴²“I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak.”

⁴⁴³“You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright.”

⁴⁴⁴“No, I do not think so. ⁴⁴⁵I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. ⁴⁴⁶And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us our journey would be in vain. ⁴⁴⁷Good-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.”

⁴⁴⁸Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the Crown Inn.

⁴⁴⁹They 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. ⁴⁵⁰At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. ⁴⁵¹The 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. ⁴⁵²The 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.

⁴⁵³“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. ⁴⁵⁴There is a distinct element of danger.”

⁴⁵⁵“Can I be of assistance?”

⁴⁵⁶“Your presence might be invaluable.”

⁴⁵⁷“Then I shall certainly come.”

⁴⁵⁸“It is very kind of you.”

⁴⁵⁹“You speak of danger. ⁴⁶⁰You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me.”

⁴⁶¹“No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. ⁴⁶²I imagine that you saw all that I did.”

⁴⁶³“I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine.”

⁴⁶⁴“You saw the ventilator, too?”

⁴⁶⁵“Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. ⁴⁶⁶It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through.”

⁴⁶⁷“I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran.”

⁴⁶⁸“My dear Holmes!”

⁴⁶⁹“Oh, yes, I did. ⁴⁷⁰You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. ⁴⁷¹Now, of course that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. ⁴⁷²It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. ⁴⁷³I deduced a ventilator.”

⁴⁷⁴“But what harm can there be in that?”

⁴⁷⁵“Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. ⁴⁷⁶A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. ⁴⁷⁷Does not that strike you?”

⁴⁷⁸“I cannot as yet see any connection.”

⁴⁷⁹“Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?”

⁴⁸⁰“No.”

⁴⁸¹“It was clamped to the floor. ⁴⁸²Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?”

⁴⁸³“I cannot say that I have.”

⁴⁸⁴“The lady could not move her bed. ⁴⁸⁵It 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.”

⁴⁸⁶“Holmes,” I cried, “I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at. ⁴⁸⁷We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime.”

⁴⁸⁸“Subtle enough and horrible enough. ⁴⁸⁹When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. ⁴⁹⁰He has nerve and he has knowledge. ⁴⁹¹Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. ⁴⁹²This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper

still. ⁴⁹³But 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."

⁴⁹⁴About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. ⁴⁹⁵Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

⁴⁹⁶"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it comes from the middle window."

⁴⁹⁷As 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. ⁴⁹⁸A 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.

⁴⁹⁹There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. ⁵⁰⁰Making 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.

⁵⁰¹"My God!" I whispered; "did you see it?"

⁵⁰²Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. ⁵⁰³His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. ⁵⁰⁴Then he broke into a low laugh and put his lips to my ear.

⁵⁰⁵"It is a nice household," he murmured. ⁵⁰⁶"That is the baboon."

⁵⁰⁷I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. ⁵⁰⁸There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. ⁵⁰⁹I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes' example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. ⁵¹⁰My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. ⁵¹¹All was as we had seen it in the daytime. ⁵¹²Then 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:

⁵¹³"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

⁵¹⁴I nodded to show that I had heard.

⁵¹⁵"We must sit without light. ⁵¹⁶He would see it through the ventilator."

⁵¹⁷I nodded again.

⁵¹⁸"Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. ⁵¹⁹Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. ⁵²⁰I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair."

⁵²¹I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

⁵²²Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. ⁵²³By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. ⁵²⁴Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

⁵²⁵How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? ⁵²⁶I 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. ⁵²⁷The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness.

⁵²⁸From 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. ⁵²⁹Far away we could hear the deep

tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. ⁵³⁰How long they seemed, those quarters! ⁵³¹Twelve struck, and one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

⁵³²Suddenly 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. ⁵³³Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. ⁵³⁴I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. ⁵³⁵For half an hour I sat with straining ears. ⁵³⁶Then suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. ⁵³⁷The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

⁵³⁸“You see it, Watson?” he yelled. ⁵³⁹“You see it?”

⁵⁴⁰But I saw nothing. ⁵⁴¹At 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. ⁵⁴²I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale and filled with horror and loathing. ⁵⁴³He 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. ⁵⁴⁴It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. ⁵⁴⁵They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. ⁵⁴⁶It 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.

⁵⁴⁷“What can it mean?” I gasped.

⁵⁴⁸“It means that it is all over,” Holmes answered. ⁵⁴⁹“And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. ⁵⁵⁰Take your pistol, and we will enter Dr. Roylott's room.”

⁵⁵¹With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. ⁵⁵²Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. ⁵⁵³Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

⁵⁵⁴It was a singular sight which met our eyes. ⁵⁵⁵On 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. ⁵⁵⁶Beside 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. ⁵⁵⁷Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the day. ⁵⁵⁸His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. ⁵⁵⁹Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head. ⁵⁶⁰As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

⁵⁶¹“The band! the speckled band!” whispered Holmes.

⁵⁶²I took a step forward. ⁵⁶³In 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.

⁵⁶⁴“It is a swamp adder!” cried Holmes; “the deadliest snake in India. ⁵⁶⁵He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. ⁵⁶⁶Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another. ⁵⁶⁷Let 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.”

⁵⁶⁸As 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.

⁵⁶⁹Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. ⁵⁷⁰It 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. ⁵⁷¹The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

⁵⁷²"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. ⁵⁷³The 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. ⁵⁷⁴I 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. ⁵⁷⁵My 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. ⁵⁷⁶The 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. ⁵⁷⁷The 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. ⁵⁷⁸The 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. ⁵⁷⁹The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. ⁵⁸⁰It 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. ⁵⁸¹Then I thought of the whistle. ⁵⁸²Of course he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. ⁵⁸³He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. ⁵⁸⁴He 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. ⁵⁸⁵It 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.

⁵⁸⁶"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. ⁵⁸⁷An 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. ⁵⁸⁸The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. ⁵⁸⁹The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. ⁵⁹⁰Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. ⁵⁹¹I heard the creature hiss as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and attacked it."

⁵⁹²"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

⁵⁹³"And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. ⁵⁹⁴Some of the blows of my cane came home and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. ⁵⁹⁵In 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."

The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb

¹Of 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. ²Of 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. ³The 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. ⁴At the time the circumstances made a deep impression upon me, and the lapse of two years has hardly served to weaken the effect.

⁵It was in the summer of '89, not long after my marriage, that the events occurred which I am now about to summarise. ⁶I 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. ⁷My 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. ⁸One 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.

⁹One 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. ¹⁰I dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway cases were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. ¹¹As I descended, my old ally, the guard, came out of the room and closed the door tightly behind him.

¹²"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his shoulder; "he's all right."

¹³"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner suggested that it was some strange creature which he had caged up in my room.

¹⁴"It's a new patient," he whispered. ¹⁵"I thought I'd bring him round myself; then he couldn't slip away.

¹⁶There he is, all safe and sound. ¹⁷I must go now, Doctor; I have my dooties, just the same as you."

¹⁸And off he went, this trusty tout, without even giving me time to thank him.

¹⁹I entered my consulting-room and found a gentleman seated by the table. ²⁰He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed with a soft cloth cap which he had laid down upon my books. ²¹Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. ²²He 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.

²³"I am sorry to knock you up so early, Doctor," said he, "but I have had a very serious accident during the night. ²⁴I 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. ²⁵I gave the maid a card, but I see that she has left it upon the side-table."

²⁶I took it up and glanced at it. ²⁷"Mr. Victor Hatherley, hydraulic engineer, 16A, Victoria Street (3rd floor)." ²⁸That was the name, style, and abode of my morning visitor. ²⁹"I regret that I have kept you waiting," said I, sitting down in my library-chair. ³⁰"You are fresh from a night journey, I understand, which is in itself a monotonous occupation."

³¹“Oh, my night could not be called monotonous,” said he, and laughed. ³²He laughed very heartily, with a high, ringing note, leaning back in his chair and shaking his sides. ³³All my medical instincts rose up against that laugh.

³⁴“Stop it!” I cried; “pull yourself together!” and I poured out some water from a caraffe.

³⁵It was useless, however. ³⁶He was off in one of those hysterical outbursts which come upon a strong nature when some great crisis is over and gone. ³⁷Presently he came to himself once more, very weary and pale-looking.

³⁸“I have been making a fool of myself,” he gasped.

³⁹“Not at all. ⁴⁰Drink this.” ⁴¹I dashed some brandy into the water, and the colour began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

⁴²“That’s better!” said he. ⁴³“And now, Doctor, perhaps you would kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb used to be.”

⁴⁴He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. ⁴⁵It gave even my hardened nerves a shudder to look at it. ⁴⁶There were four protruding fingers and a horrid red, spongy surface where the thumb should have been. ⁴⁷It had been hacked or torn right out from the roots.

⁴⁸“Good heavens!” I cried, “this is a terrible injury. ⁴⁹It must have bled considerably.”

⁵⁰“Yes, it did. ⁵¹I fainted when it was done, and I think that I must have been senseless for a long time. ⁵²When 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.”

⁵³“Excellent! ⁵⁴You should have been a surgeon.”

⁵⁵“It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own province.”

⁵⁶“This has been done,” said I, examining the wound, “by a very heavy and sharp instrument.”

⁵⁷“A thing like a cleaver,” said he.

⁵⁸“An accident, I presume?”

⁵⁹“By no means.”

⁶⁰“What! a murderous attack?”

⁶¹“Very murderous indeed.”

⁶²“You horrify me.”

⁶³I sponged the wound, cleaned it, dressed it, and finally covered it over with cotton wadding and carbolic bandages. ⁶⁴He lay back without wincing, though he bit his lip from time to time.

⁶⁵“How is that?” I asked when I had finished.

⁶⁶“Capital! ⁶⁷Between your brandy and your bandage, I feel a new man. ⁶⁸I was very weak, but I have had a good deal to go through.”

⁶⁹“Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. ⁷⁰It is evidently trying to your nerves.”

⁷¹“Oh, no, not now. ⁷²I 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.”

⁷³“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.”

⁷⁴“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. ⁷⁵Would you give me an introduction to him?”

⁷⁶“I’ll do better. ⁷⁷I’ll take you round to him myself.”

⁷⁸“I should be immensely obliged to you.”

⁷⁹“We’ll call a cab and go together. ⁸⁰We shall just be in time to have a little breakfast with him. ⁸¹Do you feel equal to it?”

⁸²“Yes; I shall not feel easy until I have told my story.”

⁸³“Then my servant will call a cab, and I shall be with you in an instant.” ⁸⁴I 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.

⁸⁵Sherlock 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. ⁸⁶He received us in his quietly genial fashion, ordered fresh rashers and eggs, and joined us in a hearty meal. ⁸⁷When 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.

⁸⁸“It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one, Mr. Hatherley,” said he. ⁸⁹“Pray, lie down there and make yourself absolutely at home. ⁹⁰Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired and keep up your strength with a little stimulant.”

⁹¹“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. ⁹²I shall take up as little of your valuable time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar experiences.”

⁹³Holmes 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.

⁹⁴“You must know,” said he, “that I am an orphan and a bachelor, residing alone in lodgings in London.

⁹⁵By 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.

⁹⁶Two 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.

⁹⁷“I suppose that everyone finds his first independent start in business a dreary experience. ⁹⁸To me it has been exceptionally so. ⁹⁹During two years I have had three consultations and one small job, and that is absolutely all that my profession has brought me. ¹⁰⁰My gross takings amount to £27 10s. ¹⁰¹Every 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.

¹⁰²“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. ¹⁰³He brought up a card, too, with the name of ‘Colonel Lysander Stark’ engraved upon it. ¹⁰⁴Close at his heels came the colonel himself, a man rather over the middle size, but of an exceeding thinness. ¹⁰⁵I do not think that I have ever seen so thin a man. ¹⁰⁶His whole face sharpened away into nose and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over his outstanding bones. ¹⁰⁷Yet 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. ¹⁰⁸He was plainly but neatly dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than thirty.

¹⁰⁹“‘Mr. Hatherley?’ said he, with something of a German accent. ¹¹⁰‘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.’

¹¹¹“I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an address. ¹¹²‘May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?’

¹¹³“‘Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just at this moment. ¹¹⁴I have it from the same source that you are both an orphan and a bachelor and are residing alone in London.’

¹¹⁵“‘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. ¹¹⁶I understand that it was on a professional matter that you wished to speak to me?’

¹¹⁷“‘Undoubtedly so. ¹¹⁸But you will find that all I say is really to the point. ¹¹⁹I 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.’

¹²⁰“‘If I promise to keep a secret,’ said I, ‘you may absolutely depend upon my doing so.’

¹²¹“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.

¹²²“‘Do you promise, then?’ said he at last.

¹²³“‘Yes, I promise.’

¹²⁴“‘Absolute and complete silence before, during, and after? ¹²⁵No reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?’

¹²⁶“‘I have already given you my word.’

¹²⁷“‘Very good.’ ¹²⁸He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning across the room he flung open the door. ¹²⁹The passage outside was empty.

¹³⁰“‘That’s all right,’ said he, coming back. ¹³¹‘I know that clerks are sometimes curious as to their master’s affairs. ¹³²Now we can talk in safety.’ ¹³³He drew up his chair very close to mine and began to stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

¹³⁴“A feeling of repulsion, and of something akin to fear had begun to rise within me at the strange antics of this fleshless man. ¹³⁵Even my dread of losing a client could not restrain me from showing my impatience.

¹³⁶“‘I beg that you will state your business, sir,’ said I; ‘my time is of value.’ ¹³⁷Heaven forgive me for that last sentence, but the words came to my lips.

¹³⁸“‘How would fifty guineas for a night’s work suit you?’ he asked.

¹³⁹“‘Most admirably.’

¹⁴⁰“‘I say a night's work, but an hour's would be nearer the mark. ¹⁴¹I simply want your opinion about a hydraulic stamping machine which has got out of gear. ¹⁴²If you show us what is wrong we shall soon set it right ourselves. ¹⁴³What do you think of such a commission as that?’

¹⁴⁴“‘The work appears to be light and the pay munificent.’

¹⁴⁵“‘Precisely so. ¹⁴⁶We shall want you to come to-night by the last train.’

¹⁴⁷“‘Where to?’

¹⁴⁸“‘To Eyford, in Berkshire. ¹⁴⁹It is a little place near the borders of Oxfordshire, and within seven miles of Reading. ¹⁵⁰There is a train from Paddington which would bring you there at about 11.15.’

¹⁵¹“‘Very good.’

¹⁵²“‘I shall come down in a carriage to meet you.’

¹⁵³“‘There is a drive, then?’

¹⁵⁴“‘Yes, our little place is quite out in the country. ¹⁵⁵It is a good seven miles from Eyford Station.’

¹⁵⁶“‘Then we can hardly get there before midnight. ¹⁵⁷I suppose there would be no chance of a train back. ¹⁵⁸I should be compelled to stop the night.’

¹⁵⁹“‘Yes, we could easily give you a shake-down.’

¹⁶⁰“‘That is very awkward. ¹⁶¹Could I not come at some more convenient hour?’

¹⁶²“‘We have judged it best that you should come late. ¹⁶³It 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. ¹⁶⁴Still, of course, if you would like to draw out of the business, there is plenty of time to do so.’

¹⁶⁵“‘I thought of the fifty guineas, and of how very useful they would be to me. ¹⁶⁶‘Not at all,’ said I, ‘I shall be very happy to accommodate myself to your wishes. ¹⁶⁷I should like, however, to understand a little more clearly what it is that you wish me to do.’

¹⁶⁸“‘Quite so. ¹⁶⁹It is very natural that the pledge of secrecy which we have exacted from you should have aroused your curiosity. ¹⁷⁰I have no wish to commit you to anything without your having it all laid before you. ¹⁷¹I suppose that we are absolutely safe from eavesdroppers?’

¹⁷²“‘Entirely.’

¹⁷³“‘Then the matter stands thus. ¹⁷⁴You are probably aware that fuller's-earth is a valuable product, and that it is only found in one or two places in England?’

¹⁷⁵“‘I have heard so.’

¹⁷⁶“‘Some little time ago I bought a small place—a very small place—within ten miles of Reading. ¹⁷⁷I was fortunate enough to discover that there was a deposit of fuller's-earth in one of my fields. ¹⁷⁸On 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. ¹⁷⁹These good people were absolutely ignorant that their land contained that which was quite as valuable as a gold-mine. ¹⁸⁰Naturally, 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. ¹⁸¹This we have now been doing for some time, and in order to help us in our operations we erected a hydraulic press. ¹⁸²This press, as I have already explained, has got out of order, and we wish your advice upon the subject. ¹⁸³We 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. ¹⁸⁴That is why I have made you promise me that you will not tell a human being that you are going to Eyford to-night. ¹⁸⁵I hope that I make it all plain?

¹⁸⁶“I quite follow you,” said I. ¹⁸⁷“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.”

¹⁸⁸“Ah!” said he carelessly, “we have our own process. ¹⁸⁹We compress the earth into bricks, so as to remove them without revealing what they are. ¹⁹⁰But that is a mere detail. ¹⁹¹I have taken you fully into my confidence now, Mr. Hatherley, and I have shown you how I trust you.” ¹⁹²He rose as he spoke. ¹⁹³“I shall expect you, then, at Eyford at 11.15.”

¹⁹⁴“I shall certainly be there.”

¹⁹⁵“And not a word to a soul.” ¹⁹⁶He looked at me with a last long, questioning gaze, and then, pressing my hand in a cold, dank grasp, he hurried from the room.

¹⁹⁷“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. ¹⁹⁸On 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. ¹⁹⁹On 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. ²⁰⁰However, 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.

²⁰¹“At Reading I had to change not only my carriage but my station. ²⁰²However, I was in time for the last train to Eyford, and I reached the little dim-lit station after eleven o'clock. ²⁰³I was the only passenger who got out there, and there was no one upon the platform save a single sleepy porter with a lantern. ²⁰⁴As I passed out through the wicket gate, however, I found my acquaintance of the morning waiting in the shadow upon the other side. ²⁰⁵Without a word he grasped my arm and hurried me into a carriage, the door of which was standing open. ²⁰⁶He drew up the windows on either side, tapped on the wood-work, and away we went as fast as the horse could go.”

²⁰⁷“One horse?” interjected Holmes.

²⁰⁸“Yes, only one.”

²⁰⁹“Did you observe the colour?”

²¹⁰“Yes, I saw it by the side-lights when I was stepping into the carriage. ²¹¹It was a chestnut.”

²¹²“Tired-looking or fresh?”

²¹³“Oh, fresh and glossy.”

²¹⁴“Thank you. ²¹⁵I am sorry to have interrupted you. ²¹⁶Pray continue your most interesting statement.”

²¹⁷“Away we went then, and we drove for at least an hour. ²¹⁸Colonel 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. ²¹⁹He 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. ²²⁰The country roads seem to be not very good in that part of the world, for we lurched and jolted terribly. ²²¹I 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. ²²²Now 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. ²²³At last, however, the bumping of the road was exchanged for the crisp smoothness of a gravel-drive, and the carriage came to a stand. ²²⁴Colonel Lysander Stark sprang out, and, as I followed after him, pulled me swiftly into a porch which gaped in front of us. ²²⁵We 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. ²²⁶The 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.

²²⁷“It was pitch dark inside the house, and the colonel fumbled about looking for matches and muttering under his breath. ²²⁸Suddenly a door opened at the other end of the passage, and a long, golden bar of light shot out in our direction. ²²⁹It 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. ²³⁰I 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. ²³¹She 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. ²³²Colonel 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.

²³³“Perhaps you will have the kindness to wait in this room for a few minutes,’ said he, throwing open another door. ²³⁴It was a quiet, little, plainly furnished room, with a round table in the centre, on which several German books were scattered. ²³⁵Colonel Stark laid down the lamp on the top of a harmonium beside the door. ²³⁶‘I shall not keep you waiting an instant,’ said he, and vanished into the darkness.

²³⁷“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. ²³⁸Then 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. ²³⁹There was an old clock ticking loudly somewhere in the passage, but otherwise everything was deadly still. ²⁴⁰A vague feeling of uneasiness began to steal over me. ²⁴¹Who were these German people, and what were they doing living in this strange, out-of-the-way place? ²⁴²And where was the place? ²⁴³I was ten miles or so from Eyford, that was all I knew, but whether north, south, east, or west I had no idea. ²⁴⁴For that matter, Reading, and possibly other large towns, were within that radius, so the place might not be so secluded, after all. ²⁴⁵Yet it was quite certain, from the absolute stillness, that we were in the country. ²⁴⁶I 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.

²⁴⁷“Suddenly, without any preliminary sound in the midst of the utter stillness, the door of my room swung slowly open. ²⁴⁸The 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. ²⁴⁹I could see at a glance that she was sick with fear, and the sight sent a chill to my own heart. ²⁵⁰She 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.

²⁵¹“‘I would go,’ said she, trying hard, as it seemed to me, to speak calmly; ‘I would go. ²⁵²I should not stay here. ²⁵³There is no good for you to do.’

²⁵⁴“‘But, madam,’ said I, ‘I have not yet done what I came for. ²⁵⁵I cannot possibly leave until I have seen the machine.’

²⁵⁶“‘It is not worth your while to wait,’ she went on. ²⁵⁷‘You can pass through the door; no one hinders.’
²⁵⁸And 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. ²⁵⁹‘For the love of Heaven!’ she whispered, ‘get away from here before it is too late!’

²⁶⁰“But I am somewhat headstrong by nature, and the more ready to engage in an affair when there is some obstacle in the way. ²⁶¹I thought of my fifty-guinea fee, of my wearisome journey, and of the unpleasant night which seemed to be before me. ²⁶²Was it all to go for nothing? ²⁶³Why should I slink away without having carried out my commission, and without the payment which was my due? ²⁶⁴This woman might, for all I knew, be a monomaniac. ²⁶⁵With 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. ²⁶⁶She was about to renew her entreaties when a door slammed overhead, and the sound of several footsteps was heard upon the stairs. ²⁶⁷She listened for an instant, threw up her hands with a despairing gesture, and vanished as suddenly and as noiselessly as she had come.

²⁶⁸“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.

²⁶⁹“‘This is my secretary and manager,’ said the colonel. ²⁷⁰‘By the way, I was under the impression that I left this door shut just now. ²⁷¹I fear that you have felt the draught.’

²⁷²“‘On the contrary,’ said I, ‘I opened the door myself because I felt the room to be a little close.’

²⁷³“He shot one of his suspicious looks at me. ²⁷⁴‘Perhaps we had better proceed to business, then,’ said he. ²⁷⁵‘Mr. Ferguson and I will take you up to see the machine.’

²⁷⁶“‘I had better put my hat on, I suppose.’

²⁷⁷“‘Oh, no, it is in the house.’

²⁷⁸“‘What, you dig fuller's-earth in the house?’

²⁷⁹“‘No, no. ²⁸⁰This is only where we compress it. ²⁸¹But never mind that. ²⁸²All we wish you to do is to examine the machine and to let us know what is wrong with it.’

²⁸³“We went upstairs together, the colonel first with the lamp, the fat manager and I behind him. ²⁸⁴It 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. ²⁸⁵There 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. ²⁸⁶I 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. ²⁸⁷Ferguson 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.

²⁸⁸“Colonel Lysander Stark stopped at last before a low door, which he unlocked. ²⁸⁹Within was a small, square room, in which the three of us could hardly get at one time. ²⁹⁰Ferguson remained outside, and the colonel ushered me in.

²⁹¹“‘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. ²⁹²The 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. ²⁹³There 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. ²⁹⁴The machine goes readily enough, but there is some stiffness in the working of it, and it has lost a little of its force. ²⁹⁵Perhaps you will have the goodness to look it over and to show us how we can set it right.’

²⁹⁶“I took the lamp from him, and I examined the machine very thoroughly. ²⁹⁷It was indeed a gigantic one, and capable of exercising enormous pressure. ²⁹⁸When 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. ²⁹⁹An 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. ³⁰⁰This 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. ³⁰¹When 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. ³⁰²It 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. ³⁰³The 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. ³⁰⁴I 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.

³⁰⁵“‘What are you doing there?’ he asked.

³⁰⁶“I felt angry at having been tricked by so elaborate a story as that which he had told me. ³⁰⁷‘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.’

³⁰⁸“The instant that I uttered the words I regretted the rashness of my speech. ³⁰⁹His face set hard, and a baleful light sprang up in his grey eyes.

³¹⁰“‘Very well,’ said he, ‘you shall know all about the machine.’ ³¹¹He took a step backward, slammed the little door, and turned the key in the lock. ³¹²I 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. ³¹³‘Hullo!’ I yelled. ³¹⁴‘Hullo! Colonel!’ ³¹⁵Let me out!’

³¹⁶“And then suddenly in the silence I heard a sound which sent my heart into my mouth. ³¹⁷It was the clank of the levers and the swish of the leaking cylinder. ³¹⁸He had set the engine at work. ³¹⁹The lamp still stood upon the floor where I had placed it when examining the trough. ³²⁰By 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. ³²¹I 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. ³²²The ceiling was only a foot or two above my head, and with my hand upraised I could feel its hard, rough surface. ³²³Then it flashed through my mind that the pain of my death would depend very much upon the position in which I met it. ³²⁴If I lay on my face the weight would come upon my spine, and I shuddered to think of that dreadful snap. ³²⁵Easier the other way, perhaps; and yet, had I the nerve to lie and look up at that deadly black shadow wavering down upon me? ³²⁶Already I was unable to stand erect, when my eye caught something which brought a gush of hope back to my heart.

³²⁷“I have said that though the floor and ceiling were of iron, the walls were of wood. ³²⁸As 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. ³²⁹For an instant I could hardly believe that here was indeed a door which led away from death. ³³⁰The next instant I threw myself through, and lay half-fainting upon the other side. ³³¹The 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.

³³²“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. ³³³It was the same good friend whose warning I had so foolishly rejected.

³³⁴“Come! come!’ she cried breathlessly. ³³⁵‘They will be here in a moment. ³³⁶They will see that you are not there. ³³⁷Oh, do not waste the so-precious time, but come!’

³³⁸“This time, at least, I did not scorn her advice. ³³⁹I staggered to my feet and ran with her along the corridor and down a winding stair. ³⁴⁰The 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. ³⁴¹My guide stopped and looked about her like one who is at her wit’s end. ³⁴²Then she threw open a door which led into a bedroom, through the window of which the moon was shining brightly.

³⁴³“‘It is your only chance,’ said she. ³⁴⁴‘It is high, but it may be that you can jump it.’

³⁴⁵“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. ³⁴⁶I rushed across the bedroom, flung open the window, and looked out. ³⁴⁷How quiet and sweet and wholesome the garden looked in the moonlight, and it could not be more than thirty feet down. ³⁴⁸I 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. ³⁴⁹If she were ill-used, then at any risks I was determined to go back to her assistance. ³⁵⁰The 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.

³⁵¹“‘Fritz! Fritz!’ she cried in English, ‘remember your promise after the last time. ³⁵²You said it should not be again. ³⁵³He will be silent! ³⁵⁴Oh, he will be silent!’

³⁵⁵“‘You are mad, Elise!’ he shouted, struggling to break away from her. ³⁵⁶‘You will be the ruin of us. ³⁵⁷He has seen too much. ³⁵⁸Let me pass, I say!’ ³⁵⁹He dashed her to one side, and, rushing to the window, cut at me with his heavy weapon. ³⁶⁰I had let myself go, and was hanging by the hands to the sill, when his blow fell. ³⁶¹I was conscious of a dull pain, my grip loosened, and I fell into the garden below.

³⁶²“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. ³⁶³Suddenly, however, as I ran, a deadly dizziness and sickness came over me. ³⁶⁴I 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. ³⁶⁵I 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.

³⁶⁶“How long I remained unconscious I cannot tell. ³⁶⁷It must have been a very long time, for the moon had sunk, and a bright morning was breaking when I came to myself. ³⁶⁸My clothes were all sodden with dew, and my coat-sleeve was drenched with blood from my wounded thumb. ³⁶⁹The 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. ³⁷⁰But to my astonishment, when I came to look round me, neither house nor garden were to be seen. ³⁷¹I 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. ³⁷²Were it not for the ugly wound upon my hand, all that had passed during those dreadful hours might have been an evil dream.

³⁷³“Half dazed, I went into the station and asked about the morning train. ³⁷⁴There would be one to Reading in less than an hour. ³⁷⁵The same porter was on duty, I found, as had been there when I arrived. ³⁷⁶I inquired of him whether he had ever heard of Colonel Lysander Stark. ³⁷⁷The name was strange to him. ³⁷⁸Had he observed a carriage the night before waiting for me? ³⁷⁹No, he had not. ³⁸⁰Was there a police-station anywhere near? ³⁸¹There was one about three miles off.

³⁸²“It was too far for me to go, weak and ill as I was. ³⁸³I determined to wait until I got back to town before telling my story to the police. ³⁸⁴It 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. ³⁸⁵I put the case into your hands and shall do exactly what you advise.”

³⁸⁶We both sat in silence for some little time after listening to this extraordinary narrative. ³⁸⁷Then Sherlock Holmes pulled down from the shelf one of the ponderous commonplace books in which he placed his cuttings.

³⁸⁸“Here is an advertisement which will interest you,” said he. ³⁸⁹“It appeared in all the papers about a year ago. ³⁹⁰Listen to this:

³⁹¹“Lost, on the 9th inst., Mr. Jeremiah Hayling, aged twenty-six, a hydraulic engineer. ³⁹²Left his lodgings at ten o'clock at night, and has not been heard of since. ³⁹³Was dressed in—’

³⁹⁴etc., etc. ³⁹⁵Ha! ³⁹⁶That represents the last time that the colonel needed to have his machine overhauled, I fancy.”

³⁹⁷“Good heavens!” cried my patient. ³⁹⁸“Then that explains what the girl said.”

³⁹⁹“Undoubtedly. ⁴⁰⁰It 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. ⁴⁰¹Well, 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.”

⁴⁰²Some three hours or so afterwards we were all in the train together, bound from Reading to the little Berkshire village. ⁴⁰³There were Sherlock Holmes, the hydraulic engineer, Inspector Bradstreet, of Scotland Yard, a plain-clothes man, and myself. ⁴⁰⁴Bradstreet 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.

⁴⁰⁵“There you are,” said he. ⁴⁰⁶“That circle is drawn at a radius of ten miles from the village. ⁴⁰⁷The place we want must be somewhere near that line. ⁴⁰⁸You said ten miles, I think, sir.”

⁴⁰⁹“It was an hour's good drive.”

⁴¹⁰“And you think that they brought you back all that way when you were unconscious?”

⁴¹¹“They must have done so. ⁴¹²I have a confused memory, too, of having been lifted and conveyed somewhere.”

⁴¹³“What I cannot understand,” said I, “is why they should have spared you when they found you lying fainting in the garden. ⁴¹⁴Perhaps the villain was softened by the woman's entreaties.”

⁴¹⁵“I hardly think that likely. ⁴¹⁶I never saw a more inexorable face in my life.”

⁴¹⁷“Oh, we shall soon clear up all that,” said Bradstreet. ⁴¹⁸“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.”

⁴¹⁹“I think I could lay my finger on it,” said Holmes quietly.

⁴²⁰“Really, now!” cried the inspector, “you have formed your opinion! ⁴²¹Come, now, we shall see who agrees with you. ⁴²²I say it is south, for the country is more deserted there.”

⁴²³“And I say east,” said my patient.

⁴²⁴“I am for west,” remarked the plain-clothes man. ⁴²⁵“There are several quiet little villages up there.”

⁴²⁶“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.”

⁴²⁷“Come,” cried the inspector, laughing; “it’s a very pretty diversity of opinion. ⁴²⁸We have boxed the compass among us. ⁴²⁹Who do you give your casting vote to?”

⁴³⁰“You are all wrong.”

⁴³¹“But we can’t all be.”

⁴³²“Oh, yes, you can. ⁴³³This is my point.” ⁴³⁴He placed his finger in the centre of the circle. ⁴³⁵“This is where we shall find them.”

⁴³⁶“But the twelve-mile drive?” gasped Hatherley.

⁴³⁷“Six out and six back. ⁴³⁸Nothing simpler. ⁴³⁹You say yourself that the horse was fresh and glossy when you got in. ⁴⁴⁰How could it be that if it had gone twelve miles over heavy roads?”

⁴⁴¹“Indeed, it is a likely ruse enough,” observed Bradstreet thoughtfully. ⁴⁴²“Of course there can be no doubt as to the nature of this gang.”

⁴⁴³“None at all,” said Holmes. ⁴⁴⁴“They are coiners on a large scale, and have used the machine to form the amalgam which has taken the place of silver.”

⁴⁴⁵“We have known for some time that a clever gang was at work,” said the inspector. ⁴⁴⁶“They have been turning out half-crowns by the thousand. ⁴⁴⁷We 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. ⁴⁴⁸But now, thanks to this lucky chance, I think that we have got them right enough.”

⁴⁴⁹But the inspector was mistaken, for those criminals were not destined to fall into the hands of justice.

⁴⁵⁰As 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.

⁴⁵¹“A house on fire?” asked Bradstreet as the train steamed off again on its way.

⁴⁵²“Yes, sir!” said the station-master.

⁴⁵³“When did it break out?”

⁴⁵⁴“I hear that it was during the night, sir, but it has got worse, and the whole place is in a blaze.”

⁴⁵⁵“Whose house is it?”

⁴⁵⁶“Dr. Becher’s.”

⁴⁵⁷“Tell me,” broke in the engineer, “is Dr. Becher a German, very thin, with a long, sharp nose?”

⁴⁵⁸The station-master laughed heartily. ⁴⁵⁹“No, sir, Dr. Becher is an Englishman, and there isn’t a man in the parish who has a better-lined waistcoat. ⁴⁶⁰But 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.”

⁴⁶¹The station-master had not finished his speech before we were all hastening in the direction of the fire. ⁴⁶²The 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.

⁴⁶³“That’s it!” cried Hatherley, in intense excitement. ⁴⁶⁴“There is the gravel-drive, and there are the rose-bushes where I lay. ⁴⁶⁵That second window is the one that I jumped from.”

⁴⁶⁶“Well, at least,” said Holmes, “you have had your revenge upon them. ⁴⁶⁷There 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. ⁴⁶⁸Now 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.”

⁴⁶⁹And 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. ⁴⁷⁰Early 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.

⁴⁷¹The 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.

⁴⁷²About 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. ⁴⁷³Large 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.

⁴⁷⁴How 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. ⁴⁷⁵He had evidently been carried down by two persons, one of whom had remarkably small feet and the other unusually large ones. ⁴⁷⁶On 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.

⁴⁷⁷“Well,” said our engineer ruefully as we took our seats to return once more to London, “it has been a pretty business for me! ⁴⁷⁸I have lost my thumb and I have lost a fifty-guinea fee, and what have I gained?”

⁴⁷⁹“Experience,” said Holmes, laughing. ⁴⁸⁰“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.”

The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor

¹The 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. ²Fresh scandals have eclipsed it, and their more piquant details have drawn the gossips away from this four-year-old drama. ³As 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.

⁴It 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. ⁵I 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. ⁶With 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.

⁷"Here is a very fashionable epistle," I remarked as he entered. ⁸"Your morning letters, if I remember right, were from a fish-monger and a tide-waiter."

⁹"Yes, my correspondence has certainly the charm of variety," he answered, smiling, "and the humbler are usually the more interesting. ¹⁰This looks like one of those unwelcome social summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie."

¹¹He broke the seal and glanced over the contents.

¹²"Oh, come, it may prove to be something of interest, after all."

¹³"Not social, then?"

¹⁴"No, distinctly professional."

¹⁵"And from a noble client?"

¹⁶"One of the highest in England."

¹⁷"My dear fellow, I congratulate you."

¹⁸"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. ¹⁹It is just possible, however, that that also may not be wanting in this new investigation. ²⁰You have been reading the papers diligently of late, have you not?"

²¹"It looks like it," said I ruefully, pointing to a huge bundle in the corner. ²²"I have had nothing else to do."

²³"It is fortunate, for you will perhaps be able to post me up. ²⁴I read nothing except the criminal news and the agony column. ²⁵The latter is always instructive. ²⁶But if you have followed recent events so closely you must have read about Lord St. Simon and his wedding?"

²⁷"Oh, yes, with the deepest interest."

²⁸"That is well. ²⁹The letter which I hold in my hand is from Lord St. Simon. ³⁰I will read it to you, and in return you must turn over these papers and let me have whatever bears upon the matter. ³¹This is what he says:

³²“My dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes:

³³“Lord Backwater tells me that I may place implicit reliance upon your judgment and discretion. ³⁴I 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. ³⁵Mr. 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. ³⁶I 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.

³⁷“Yours faithfully,

³⁸“St. Simon.’

³⁹“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.

⁴⁰“He says four o'clock. ⁴¹It is three now. ⁴²He will be here in an hour.”

⁴³“Then I have just time, with your assistance, to get clear upon the subject. ⁴⁴Turn over those papers and arrange the extracts in their order of time, while I take a glance as to who our client is.” ⁴⁵He picked a red-covered volume from a line of books of reference beside the mantelpiece. ⁴⁶“Here he is,” said he, sitting down and flattening it out upon his knee. ⁴⁷“Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral.’ ⁴⁸Hum! ⁴⁹Arms: Azure, three caltrops in chief over a fess sable. ⁵⁰Born in 1846.’ ⁵¹He's forty-one years of age, which is mature for marriage. ⁵²Was Under-Secretary for the colonies in a late administration. ⁵³The Duke, his father, was at one time Secretary for Foreign Affairs. ⁵⁴They inherit Plantagenet blood by direct descent, and Tudor on the distaff side. ⁵⁵Ha! ⁵⁶Well, there is nothing very instructive in all this. ⁵⁷I think that I must turn to you Watson, for something more solid.”

⁵⁸“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. ⁵⁹I 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.”

⁶⁰“Oh, you mean the little problem of the Grosvenor Square furniture van. ⁶¹That is quite cleared up now—though, indeed, it was obvious from the first. ⁶²Pray give me the results of your newspaper selections.”

⁶³“Here is the first notice which I can find. ⁶⁴It is in the personal column of the Morning Post, and dates, as you see, some weeks back:

⁶⁵“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.’

⁶⁶“That is all.”

⁶⁷“Terse and to the point,” remarked Holmes, stretching his long, thin legs towards the fire.

⁶⁸“There was a paragraph amplifying this in one of the society papers of the same week. ⁶⁹Ah, here it is:

⁷⁰“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. ⁷¹One by one the management of the noble houses of Great Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from across the Atlantic. ⁷²An important addition has been made during the last week to the list of the prizes which have been borne away by

these charming invaders. ⁷³Lord 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. ⁷⁴Miss 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. ⁷⁵As 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.”

⁷⁶“Anything else?” asked Holmes, yawning.

⁷⁷“Oh, yes; plenty. ⁷⁸Then 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. ⁷⁹Two 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. ⁸⁰Those are all the notices which appeared before the disappearance of the bride.”

⁸¹“Before the what?” asked Holmes with a start.

⁸²“The vanishing of the lady.”

⁸³“When did she vanish, then?”

⁸⁴“At the wedding breakfast.”

⁸⁵“Indeed. ⁸⁶This is more interesting than it promised to be; quite dramatic, in fact.”

⁸⁷“Yes; it struck me as being a little out of the common.”

⁸⁸“They often vanish before the ceremony, and occasionally during the honeymoon; but I cannot call to mind anything quite so prompt as this. ⁸⁹Pray let me have the details.”

⁹⁰“I warn you that they are very incomplete.”

⁹¹“Perhaps we may make them less so.”

⁹²“Such as they are, they are set forth in a single article of a morning paper of yesterday, which I will read to you. ⁹³It is headed, ‘Singular Occurrence at a Fashionable Wedding’:

⁹⁴“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. ⁹⁵The 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. ⁹⁶In 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.

⁹⁷“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. ⁹⁸The whole party proceeded afterwards to the house of Mr. Aloysius Doran, at Lancaster Gate, where breakfast had been prepared. ⁹⁹It 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. ¹⁰⁰It was only after

a painful and prolonged scene that she was ejected by the butler and the footman. ¹⁰¹The 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. ¹⁰²Her 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. ¹⁰³One 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. ¹⁰⁴On 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. ¹⁰⁵Up to a late hour last night, however, nothing had transpired as to the whereabouts of the missing lady. ¹⁰⁶There 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.”

¹⁰⁷“And is that all?”

¹⁰⁸“Only one little item in another of the morning papers, but it is a suggestive one.”

¹⁰⁹“And it is—”

¹¹⁰“That Miss Flora Millar, the lady who had caused the disturbance, has actually been arrested. ¹¹¹It appears that she was formerly a danseuse at the Allegro, and that she has known the bridegroom for some years. ¹¹²There 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.”

¹¹³“And an exceedingly interesting case it appears to be. ¹¹⁴I would not have missed it for worlds. ¹¹⁵But 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. ¹¹⁶Do not dream of going, Watson, for I very much prefer having a witness, if only as a check to my own memory.”

¹¹⁷“Lord Robert St. Simon,” announced our page-boy, throwing open the door. ¹¹⁸A 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. ¹¹⁹His 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. ¹²⁰His hair, too, as he swept off his very curly-brimmed hat, was grizzled round the edges and thin upon the top. ¹²¹As 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. ¹²²He 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.

¹²³“Good-day, Lord St. Simon,” said Holmes, rising and bowing. ¹²⁴“Pray take the basket-chair. ¹²⁵This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson. ¹²⁶Draw up a little to the fire, and we will talk this matter over.”

¹²⁷“A most painful matter to me, as you can most readily imagine, Mr. Holmes. I have been cut to the quick. ¹²⁸I 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.”

¹²⁹“No, I am descending.”

¹³⁰“I beg pardon.”

¹³¹“My last client of the sort was a king.”

¹³²“Oh, really! ¹³³I had no idea. ¹³⁴And which king?”

¹³⁵“The King of Scandinavia.”

¹³⁶“What! ¹³⁷Had he lost his wife?”

¹³⁸“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.”

¹³⁹“Of course! ¹⁴⁰Very right! very right! ¹⁴¹I’m sure I beg pardon. ¹⁴²As to my own case, I am ready to give you any information which may assist you in forming an opinion.”

¹⁴³“Thank you. ¹⁴⁴I have already learned all that is in the public prints, nothing more. ¹⁴⁵I presume that I may take it as correct—this article, for example, as to the disappearance of the bride.”

¹⁴⁶Lord St. Simon glanced over it. ¹⁴⁷“Yes, it is correct, as far as it goes.”

¹⁴⁸“But it needs a great deal of supplementing before anyone could offer an opinion. ¹⁴⁹I think that I may arrive at my facts most directly by questioning you.”

¹⁵⁰“Pray do so.”

¹⁵¹“When did you first meet Miss Hatty Doran?”

¹⁵²“In San Francisco, a year ago.”

¹⁵³“You were travelling in the States?”

¹⁵⁴“Yes.”

¹⁵⁵“Did you become engaged then?”

¹⁵⁶“No.”

¹⁵⁷“But you were on a friendly footing?”

¹⁵⁸“I was amused by her society, and she could see that I was amused.”

¹⁵⁹“Her father is very rich?”

¹⁶⁰“He is said to be the richest man on the Pacific slope.”

¹⁶¹“And how did he make his money?”

¹⁶²“In mining. ¹⁶³He had nothing a few years ago. ¹⁶⁴Then he struck gold, invested it, and came up by leaps and bounds.”

¹⁶⁵“Now, what is your own impression as to the young lady’s—your wife’s character?”

¹⁶⁶The nobleman swung his glasses a little faster and stared down into the fire. ¹⁶⁷“You see, Mr. Holmes,” said he, “my wife was twenty before her father became a rich man. ¹⁶⁸During 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. ¹⁶⁹She is what we call in England a tomboy, with a strong nature, wild and free, unfettered by any sort of traditions. ¹⁷⁰She is impetuous—volcanic, I was about to say. ¹⁷¹She is swift in making up her mind and fearless in carrying out her resolutions. ¹⁷²On 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. ¹⁷³I believe that she is capable of heroic self-sacrifice and that anything dishonourable would be repugnant to her.”

¹⁷⁴“Have you her photograph?”

¹⁷⁵“I brought this with me.” ¹⁷⁶He opened a locket and showed us the full face of a very lovely woman. ¹⁷⁷It 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. ¹⁷⁸Holmes gazed long and earnestly at it. ¹⁷⁹Then he closed the locket and handed it back to Lord St. Simon.

¹⁸⁰“The young lady came to London, then, and you renewed your acquaintance?”

¹⁸¹“Yes, her father brought her over for this last London season. ¹⁸²I met her several times, became engaged to her, and have now married her.”

¹⁸³“She brought, I understand, a considerable dowry?”

¹⁸⁴“A fair dowry. ¹⁸⁵Not more than is usual in my family.”

¹⁸⁶“And this, of course, remains to you, since the marriage is a fait accompli?”

¹⁸⁷“I really have made no inquiries on the subject.”

¹⁸⁸“Very naturally not. ¹⁸⁹Did you see Miss Doran on the day before the wedding?”

¹⁹⁰“Yes.”

¹⁹¹“Was she in good spirits?”

¹⁹²“Never better. ¹⁹³She kept talking of what we should do in our future lives.”

¹⁹⁴“Indeed! ¹⁹⁵That is very interesting. ¹⁹⁶And on the morning of the wedding?”

¹⁹⁷“She was as bright as possible—at least until after the ceremony.”

¹⁹⁸“And did you observe any change in her then?”

¹⁹⁹“Well, to tell the truth, I saw then the first signs that I had ever seen that her temper was just a little sharp. ²⁰⁰The incident however, was too trivial to relate and can have no possible bearing upon the case.”

²⁰¹“Pray let us have it, for all that.”

²⁰²“Oh, it is childish. ²⁰³She dropped her bouquet as we went towards the vestry. ²⁰⁴She was passing the front pew at the time, and it fell over into the pew. ²⁰⁵There 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. ²⁰⁶Yet 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.”

²⁰⁷“Indeed! ²⁰⁸You say that there was a gentleman in the pew. ²⁰⁹Some of the general public were present, then?”

²¹⁰“Oh, yes. It is impossible to exclude them when the church is open.”

²¹¹“This gentleman was not one of your wife's friends?”

²¹²“No, no; I call him a gentleman by courtesy, but he was quite a common-looking person. ²¹³I hardly noticed his appearance. ²¹⁴But really I think that we are wandering rather far from the point.”

²¹⁵“Lady St. Simon, then, returned from the wedding in a less cheerful frame of mind than she had gone to it. ²¹⁶What did she do on re-entering her father's house?”

²¹⁷“I saw her in conversation with her maid.”

²¹⁸“And who is her maid?”

²¹⁹“Alice is her name. ²²⁰She is an American and came from California with her.”

²²¹“A confidential servant?”

²²²“A little too much so. ²²³It seemed to me that her mistress allowed her to take great liberties. ²²⁴Still, of course, in America they look upon these things in a different way.”

²²⁵“How long did she speak to this Alice?”

²²⁶“Oh, a few minutes. ²²⁷I had something else to think of.”

²²⁸“You did not overhear what they said?”

²²⁹“Lady St. Simon said something about ‘jumping a claim.’ ²³⁰She was accustomed to use slang of the kind. ²³¹I have no idea what she meant.”

²³²“American slang is very expressive sometimes. ²³³And what did your wife do when she finished speaking to her maid?”

²³⁴“She walked into the breakfast-room.”

²³⁵“On your arm?”

²³⁶“No, alone. ²³⁷She was very independent in little matters like that. ²³⁸Then, after we had sat down for ten minutes or so, she rose hurriedly, muttered some words of apology, and left the room. ²³⁹She never came back.”

²⁴⁰“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.”

²⁴¹“Quite so. ²⁴²And 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.”

²⁴³“Ah, yes. ²⁴⁴I should like a few particulars as to this young lady, and your relations to her.”

²⁴⁵Lord St. Simon shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows. ²⁴⁶“We have been on a friendly footing for some years—I may say on a very friendly footing. ²⁴⁷She used to be at the Allegro. ²⁴⁸I have not treated her ungenerously, and she had no just cause of complaint against me, but you know what women are, Mr. Holmes. ²⁴⁹Flora was a dear little thing, but exceedingly hot-headed and devotedly attached to me. ²⁵⁰She 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. ²⁵¹She 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. ²⁵²She was quiet when she saw that there was no good in making a row.”

²⁵³“Did your wife hear all this?”

²⁵⁴“No, thank goodness, she did not.”

²⁵⁵“And she was seen walking with this very woman afterwards?”

²⁵⁶“Yes. ²⁵⁷That is what Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, looks upon as so serious. ²⁵⁸It is thought that Flora decoyed my wife out and laid some terrible trap for her.”

²⁵⁹“Well, it is a possible supposition.”

²⁶⁰“You think so, too?”

²⁶¹“I did not say a probable one. ²⁶²But you do not yourself look upon this as likely?”

²⁶³“I do not think Flora would hurt a fly.”

²⁶⁴“Still, jealousy is a strange transformer of characters. ²⁶⁵Pray what is your own theory as to what took place?”

²⁶⁶“Well, really, I came to seek a theory, not to propound one. ²⁶⁷I have given you all the facts. ²⁶⁸Since 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.”

²⁶⁹“In short, that she had become suddenly deranged?”

²⁷⁰“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.”

²⁷¹“Well, certainly that is also a conceivable hypothesis,” said Holmes, smiling. ²⁷²“And now, Lord St. Simon, I think that I have nearly all my data. ²⁷³May I ask whether you were seated at the breakfast-table so that you could see out of the window?”

²⁷⁴“We could see the other side of the road and the Park.”

²⁷⁵“Quite so. ²⁷⁶Then I do not think that I need to detain you longer. ²⁷⁷I shall communicate with you.”

²⁷⁸“Should you be fortunate enough to solve this problem,” said our client, rising.

²⁷⁹“I have solved it.”

²⁸⁰“Eh? ²⁸¹What was that?”

²⁸²“I say that I have solved it.”

²⁸³“Where, then, is my wife?”

²⁸⁴“That is a detail which I shall speedily supply.”

²⁸⁵Lord St. Simon shook his head. ²⁸⁶“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.

²⁸⁷“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. ²⁸⁸“I think that I shall have a whisky and soda and a cigar after all this cross-questioning. ²⁸⁹I had formed my conclusions as to the case before our client came into the room.”

²⁹⁰“My dear Holmes!”

²⁹¹“I have notes of several similar cases, though none, as I remarked before, which were quite as prompt.

²⁹²My whole examination served to turn my conjecture into a certainty. ²⁹³Circumstantial evidence is occasionally very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk, to quote Thoreau's example.”

²⁹⁴“But I have heard all that you have heard.”

²⁹⁵“Without, however, the knowledge of pre-existing cases which serves me so well. ²⁹⁶There 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. ²⁹⁷It is one of these cases—but, hullo, here is Lestrade! ²⁹⁸Good-afternoon, Lestrade! ²⁹⁹You will find an extra tumbler upon the sideboard, and there are cigars in the box.”

³⁰⁰The 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. ³⁰¹With a short greeting he seated himself and lit the cigar which had been offered to him.

³⁰²“What's up, then?” asked Holmes with a twinkle in his eye. ³⁰³“You look dissatisfied.”

³⁰⁴“And I feel dissatisfied. ³⁰⁵It is this infernal St. Simon marriage case. ³⁰⁶I can make neither head nor tail of the business.”

³⁰⁷“Really! ³⁰⁸You surprise me.”

³⁰⁹“Who ever heard of such a mixed affair? ³¹⁰Every clue seems to slip through my fingers. ³¹¹I have been at work upon it all day.”

³¹²“And very wet it seems to have made you,” said Holmes laying his hand upon the arm of the pea-jacket.

³¹³“Yes, I have been dragging the Serpentine.”

³¹⁴“In heaven's name, what for?”

³¹⁵“In search of the body of Lady St. Simon.”

³¹⁶Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

³¹⁷“Have you dragged the basin of Trafalgar Square fountain?” he asked.

³¹⁸“Why? ³¹⁹What do you mean?”

³²⁰“Because you have just as good a chance of finding this lady in the one as in the other.”

³²¹Lestrade shot an angry glance at my companion. ³²²“I suppose you know all about it,” he snarled.

³²³“Well, I have only just heard the facts, but my mind is made up.”

³²⁴“Oh, indeed! ³²⁵Then you think that the Serpentine plays no part in the matter?”

³²⁶“I think it very unlikely.”

³²⁷“Then perhaps you will kindly explain how it is that we found this in it?” ³²⁸He 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. ³²⁹“There,” said he, putting a new wedding-ring upon the top of the pile. ³³⁰“There is a little nut for you to crack, Master Holmes.”

³³¹“Oh, indeed!” said my friend, blowing blue rings into the air. ³³²“You dragged them from the Serpentine?”

³³³“No. ³³⁴They were found floating near the margin by a park-keeper. ³³⁵They have been identified as her clothes, and it seemed to me that if the clothes were there the body would not be far off.”

³³⁶“By the same brilliant reasoning, every man's body is to be found in the neighbourhood of his wardrobe. ³³⁷And pray what did you hope to arrive at through this?”

³³⁸“At some evidence implicating Flora Millar in the disappearance.”

³³⁹“I am afraid that you will find it difficult.”

³⁴⁰“Are you, indeed, now?” cried Lestrade with some bitterness. ³⁴¹“I am afraid, Holmes, that you are not very practical with your deductions and your inferences. ³⁴²You have made two blunders in as many minutes. ³⁴³This dress does implicate Miss Flora Millar.”

³⁴⁴“And how?”

³⁴⁵“In the dress is a pocket. ³⁴⁶In the pocket is a card-case. ³⁴⁷In the card-case is a note. ³⁴⁸And here is the very note.” ³⁴⁹He slapped it down upon the table in front of him. ³⁵⁰“Listen to this:

³⁵¹“You will see me when all is ready. ³⁵²Come at once.

³⁵³“‘F.H.M.’

³⁵⁴Now 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. ³⁵⁵Here, 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.”

³⁵⁶“Very good, Lestrade,” said Holmes, laughing. ³⁵⁷“You really are very fine indeed. ³⁵⁸Let me see it.” ³⁵⁹He took up the paper in a listless way, but his attention instantly became riveted, and he gave a little cry of satisfaction. ³⁶⁰“This is indeed important,” said he.

³⁶¹“Ha! you find it so?”

³⁶²“Extremely so. ³⁶³I congratulate you warmly.”

³⁶⁴Lestrade rose in his triumph and bent his head to look. ³⁶⁵“Why,” he shrieked, “you’re looking at the wrong side!”

³⁶⁶“On the contrary, this is the right side.”

³⁶⁷“The right side? ³⁶⁸You’re mad! ³⁶⁹Here is the note written in pencil over here.”

³⁷⁰“And over here is what appears to be the fragment of a hotel bill, which interests me deeply.”

³⁷¹“There’s nothing in it. ³⁷²I looked at it before,” said Lestrade.

³⁷³“‘Oct. 4th, rooms 8s., breakfast 2s. 6d., cocktail 1s., lunch 2s. 6d., glass sherry, 8d.’ ³⁷⁴I see nothing in that.”

³⁷⁵“Very likely not. ³⁷⁶It is most important, all the same. ³⁷⁷As to the note, it is important also, or at least the initials are, so I congratulate you again.”

³⁷⁸“I’ve wasted time enough,” said Lestrade, rising. ³⁷⁹“I believe in hard work and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine theories. ³⁸⁰Good-day, Mr. Holmes, and we shall see which gets to the bottom of the matter first.” ³⁸¹He gathered up the garments, thrust them into the bag, and made for the door.

³⁸²“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. ³⁸³There is not, and there never has been, any such person.”

³⁸⁴Lestrade looked sadly at my companion. ³⁸⁵Then he turned to me, tapped his forehead three times, shook his head solemnly, and hurried away.

³⁸⁶He had hardly shut the door behind him when Holmes rose to put on his overcoat. ³⁸⁷“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.”

³⁸⁸It 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. ³⁸⁹This 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. ³⁹⁰There were a couple of brace of cold woodcock, a pheasant, a pâté de foie gras pie with a group of ancient and cobwebby

bottles. ³⁹¹Having 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.

³⁹²Just before nine o'clock Sherlock Holmes stepped briskly into the room. ³⁹³His 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.

³⁹⁴"They have laid the supper, then," he said, rubbing his hands.

³⁹⁵"You seem to expect company. ³⁹⁶They have laid for five."

³⁹⁷"Yes, I fancy we may have some company dropping in," said he. ³⁹⁸"I am surprised that Lord St. Simon has not already arrived. ³⁹⁹Ha! ⁴⁰⁰I fancy that I hear his step now upon the stairs."

⁴⁰¹It 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.

⁴⁰²"My messenger reached you, then?" asked Holmes.

⁴⁰³"Yes, and I confess that the contents startled me beyond measure. ⁴⁰⁴Have you good authority for what you say?"

⁴⁰⁵"The best possible."

⁴⁰⁶Lord St. Simon sank into a chair and passed his hand over his forehead.

⁴⁰⁷"What will the Duke say," he murmured, "when he hears that one of the family has been subjected to such humiliation?"

⁴⁰⁸"It is the purest accident. ⁴⁰⁹I cannot allow that there is any humiliation."

⁴¹⁰"Ah, you look on these things from another standpoint."

⁴¹¹"I fail to see that anyone is to blame. ⁴¹²I can hardly see how the lady could have acted otherwise, though her abrupt method of doing it was undoubtedly to be regretted. ⁴¹³Having no mother, she had no one to advise her at such a crisis."

⁴¹⁴"It was a slight, sir, a public slight," said Lord St. Simon, tapping his fingers upon the table.

⁴¹⁵"You must make allowance for this poor girl, placed in so unprecedented a position."

⁴¹⁶"I will make no allowance. ⁴¹⁷I am very angry indeed, and I have been shamefully used."

⁴¹⁸"I think that I heard a ring," said Holmes. ⁴¹⁹"Yes, there are steps on the landing. ⁴²⁰If 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." ⁴²¹He opened the door and ushered in a lady and gentleman. ⁴²²"Lord St. Simon," said he "allow me to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hay Moulton. ⁴²³The lady, I think, you have already met."

⁴²⁴At 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. ⁴²⁵The lady had taken a quick step forward and had held out her hand to him, but he still refused to raise his eyes. ⁴²⁶It was as well for his resolution, perhaps, for her pleading face was one which it was hard to resist.

⁴²⁷"You're angry, Robert," said she. ⁴²⁸"Well, I guess you have every cause to be."

⁴²⁹"Pray make no apology to me," said Lord St. Simon bitterly.

⁴³⁰“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. ⁴³¹I only wonder I didn't fall down and do a faint right there before the altar.”

⁴³²“Perhaps, Mrs. Moulton, you would like my friend and me to leave the room while you explain this matter?”

⁴³³“If I may give an opinion,” remarked the strange gentleman, “we've had just a little too much secrecy over this business already. ⁴³⁴For my part, I should like all Europe and America to hear the rights of it.”

⁴³⁵He was a small, wiry, sunburnt man, clean-shaven, with a sharp face and alert manner.

⁴³⁶“Then I'll tell our story right away,” said the lady. ⁴³⁷“Frank here and I met in '84, in McQuire's camp, near the Rockies, where pa was working a claim. ⁴³⁸We 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. ⁴³⁹The 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. ⁴⁴⁰Frank wouldn't throw up his hand, though; so he followed me there, and he saw me without pa knowing anything about it. ⁴⁴¹It would only have made him mad to know, so we just fixed it all up for ourselves. ⁴⁴²Frank said that he would go and make his pile, too, and never come back to claim me until he had as much as pa. ⁴⁴³So then I promised to wait for him to the end of time and pledged myself not to marry anyone else while he lived. ⁴⁴⁴“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?” ⁴⁴⁵Well, 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.

⁴⁴⁶“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. ⁴⁴⁷After 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. ⁴⁴⁸I fainted dead away, and I was very sick for months after. ⁴⁴⁹Pa thought I had a decline and took me to half the doctors in 'Frisco. ⁴⁵⁰Not a word of news came for a year and more, so that I never doubted that Frank was really dead. ⁴⁵¹Then 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.

⁴⁵²“Still, if I had married Lord St. Simon, of course I'd have done my duty by him. ⁴⁵³We can't command our love, but we can our actions. ⁴⁵⁴I went to the altar with him with the intention to make him just as good a wife as it was in me to be. ⁴⁵⁵But 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. ⁴⁵⁶I 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. ⁴⁵⁷I 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. ⁴⁵⁸I didn't know what to do. ⁴⁵⁹Should I stop the service and make a scene in the church? ⁴⁶⁰I 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. ⁴⁶¹Then I saw him scribble on a piece of paper, and I knew that he was writing me a note. ⁴⁶²As 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. ⁴⁶³It was only a line asking me to join him when he made the sign to me to do so. ⁴⁶⁴Of 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.

⁴⁶⁵“When I got back I told my maid, who had known him in California, and had always been his friend.

⁴⁶⁶I ordered her to say nothing, but to get a few things packed and my ulster ready. ⁴⁶⁷I know I ought to have spoken to Lord St. Simon, but it was dreadful hard before his mother and all those great people.

⁴⁶⁸I just made up my mind to run away and explain afterwards. ⁴⁶⁹I hadn't been at the table ten minutes

before I saw Frank out of the window at the other side of the road. ⁴⁷⁰He beckoned to me and then began walking into the Park. ⁴⁷¹I slipped out, put on my things, and followed him. ⁴⁷²Some 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. ⁴⁷³We 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. ⁴⁷⁴Frank 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.”

⁴⁷⁵“I saw it in a paper,” explained the American. ⁴⁷⁶“It gave the name and the church but not where the lady lived.”

⁴⁷⁷“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. ⁴⁷⁸It was awful to me to think of all those lords and ladies sitting round that breakfast-table and waiting for me to come back. ⁴⁷⁹So 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. ⁴⁸⁰It 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. ⁴⁸¹Then 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. ⁴⁸²Now, 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.”

⁴⁸³Lord 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.

⁴⁸⁴“Excuse me,” he said, “but it is not my custom to discuss my most intimate personal affairs in this public manner.”

⁴⁸⁵“Then you won't forgive me? ⁴⁸⁶You won't shake hands before I go?”

⁴⁸⁷“Oh, certainly, if it would give you any pleasure.” ⁴⁸⁸He put out his hand and coldly grasped that which she extended to him.

⁴⁸⁹“I had hoped,” suggested Holmes, “that you would have joined us in a friendly supper.”

⁴⁹⁰“I think that there you ask a little too much,” responded his Lordship. ⁴⁹¹“I may be forced to acquiesce in these recent developments, but I can hardly be expected to make merry over them. ⁴⁹²I think that with your permission I will now wish you all a very good-night.” ⁴⁹³He included us all in a sweeping bow and stalked out of the room.

⁴⁹⁴“Then I trust that you at least will honour me with your company,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁴⁹⁵“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.”

⁴⁹⁶“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. ⁴⁹⁷Nothing 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.”

⁴⁹⁸“You were not yourself at fault at all, then?”

⁴⁹⁹“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. ⁵⁰⁰Obviously something had occurred during the morning, then, to cause her to change her mind. ⁵⁰¹What could that something be? ⁵⁰²She could not have spoken to anyone when she was out, for she had been in the company of the bridegroom. ⁵⁰³Had she seen someone, then? ⁵⁰⁴If 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. ⁵⁰⁵You see we have already arrived, by a process of exclusion, at the idea that she might have seen an American. ⁵⁰⁶Then who could this American be, and why should he possess so much influence over her? ⁵⁰⁷It might be a lover; it might be a husband. ⁵⁰⁸Her young womanhood had, I knew, been spent in rough scenes and under strange conditions. ⁵⁰⁹So far I had got before I ever heard Lord St. Simon's narrative. ⁵¹⁰When 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. ⁵¹¹She 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.”

⁵¹²“And how in the world did you find them?”

⁵¹³“It might have been difficult, but friend Lestrade held information in his hands the value of which he did not himself know. ⁵¹⁴The 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.”

⁵¹⁵“How did you deduce the select?”

⁵¹⁶“By the select prices. ⁵¹⁷Eight shillings for a bed and eightpence for a glass of sherry pointed to one of the most expensive hotels. ⁵¹⁸There are not many in London which charge at that rate. ⁵¹⁹In 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. ⁵²⁰His 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. ⁵²¹I invited them to meet him here, and, as you see, I made him keep the appointment.”

⁵²²“But with no very good result,” I remarked. ⁵²³“His conduct was certainly not very gracious.”

⁵²⁴“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. ⁵²⁵I 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. ⁵²⁶Draw 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.”

The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet

¹“Holmes,” said I as I stood one morning in our bow-window looking down the street, “here is a madman coming along. ²It seems rather sad that his relatives should allow him to come out alone.”

³My friend rose lazily from his armchair and stood with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, looking over my shoulder. ⁴It 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. ⁵Down 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. ⁶The grey pavement had been cleaned and scraped, but was still dangerously slippery, so that there were fewer passengers than usual. ⁷Indeed, from the direction of the Metropolitan Station no one was coming save the single gentleman whose eccentric conduct had drawn my attention.

⁸He was a man of about fifty, tall, portly, and imposing, with a massive, strongly marked face and a commanding figure. ⁹He was dressed in a sombre yet rich style, in black frock-coat, shining hat, neat brown gaiters, and well-cut pearl-grey trousers. ¹⁰Yet 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. ¹¹As he ran he jerked his hands up and down, wagged his head, and writhed his face into the most extraordinary contortions.

¹²“What on earth can be the matter with him?” I asked. ¹³“He is looking up at the numbers of the houses.”

¹⁴“I believe that he is coming here,” said Holmes, rubbing his hands.

¹⁵“Here?”

¹⁶“Yes; I rather think he is coming to consult me professionally. ¹⁷I think that I recognise the symptoms.

¹⁸Ha! did I not tell you?” ¹⁹As he spoke, the man, puffing and blowing, rushed at our door and pulled at our bell until the whole house resounded with the clanging.

²⁰A 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. ²¹For 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. ²²Then, 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. ²³Sherlock 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.

²⁴“You have come to me to tell your story, have you not?” said he. ²⁵“You are fatigued with your haste.

²⁶Pray 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.”

²⁷The man sat for a minute or more with a heaving chest, fighting against his emotion. ²⁸Then he passed his handkerchief over his brow, set his lips tight, and turned his face towards us.

²⁹“No doubt you think me mad?” said he.

³⁰“I see that you have had some great trouble,” responded Holmes.

³¹“God knows I have!—a trouble which is enough to unseat my reason, so sudden and so terrible is it.

³²Public disgrace I might have faced, although I am a man whose character has never yet borne a stain.

³³Private 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. ³⁴Besides, it is not I alone. ³⁵The very noblest in the land may suffer unless some way be found out of this horrible affair."

³⁶"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."

³⁷"My name," answered our visitor, "is probably familiar to your ears. ³⁸I am Alexander Holder, of the banking firm of Holder & Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street."

³⁹The 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. ⁴⁰What could have happened, then, to bring one of the foremost citizens of London to this most pitiable pass? ⁴¹We waited, all curiosity, until with another effort he braced himself to tell his story.

⁴²"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. ⁴³I came to Baker Street by the Underground and hurried from there on foot, for the cabs go slowly through this snow. ⁴⁴That is why I was so out of breath, for I am a man who takes very little exercise. ⁴⁵I feel better now, and I will put the facts before you as shortly and yet as clearly as I can.

⁴⁶"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. ⁴⁷One of our most lucrative means of laying out money is in the shape of loans, where the security is unimpeachable. ⁴⁸We 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.

⁴⁹"Yesterday morning I was seated in my office at the bank when a card was brought in to me by one of the clerks. ⁵⁰I 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. ⁵¹I 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.

⁵²"Mr. Holder,' said he, 'I have been informed that you are in the habit of advancing money.'

⁵³"The firm does so when the security is good.' I answered.

⁵⁴"It is absolutely essential to me,' said he, 'that I should have £50,000 at once. ⁵⁵I 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. ⁵⁶In my position you can readily understand that it is unwise to place one's self under obligations.'

⁵⁷"For how long, may I ask, do you want this sum?' I asked.

⁵⁸"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. ⁵⁹But it is very essential to me that the money should be paid at once.'

⁶⁰"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. ⁶¹If, 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.'

⁶²"I should much prefer to have it so,' said he, raising up a square, black morocco case which he had laid beside his chair. ⁶³'You have doubtless heard of the Beryl Coronet?'

⁶⁴“One of the most precious public possessions of the empire,” said I.

⁶⁵“Precisely.” ⁶⁶He opened the case, and there, imbedded in soft, flesh-coloured velvet, lay the magnificent piece of jewellery which he had named. ⁶⁷“There are thirty-nine enormous beryls,” said he, ‘and the price of the gold chasing is incalculable. ⁶⁸The lowest estimate would put the worth of the coronet at double the sum which I have asked. ⁶⁹I am prepared to leave it with you as my security.’

⁷⁰“I took the precious case into my hands and looked in some perplexity from it to my illustrious client.

⁷¹“You doubt its value?” he asked.

⁷²“Not at all. ⁷³I only doubt—”

⁷⁴“The propriety of my leaving it. ⁷⁵You may set your mind at rest about that. ⁷⁶I should not dream of doing so were it not absolutely certain that I should be able in four days to reclaim it. ⁷⁷It is a pure matter of form. ⁷⁸Is the security sufficient?”

⁷⁹“Ample.”

⁸⁰“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. ⁸¹I 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. ⁸²Any 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. ⁸³I leave it with you, however, with every confidence, and I shall call for it in person on Monday morning.’

⁸⁴“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 notes. ⁸⁵When 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. ⁸⁶There could be no doubt that, as it was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any misfortune should occur to it. ⁸⁷I already regretted having ever consented to take charge of it. ⁸⁸However, 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.

⁸⁹“When evening came I felt that it would be an imprudence to leave so precious a thing in the office behind me. ⁹⁰Bankers' safes had been forced before now, and why should not mine be? ⁹¹If so, how terrible would be the position in which I should find myself! ⁹²I 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. ⁹³With this intention, I called a cab and drove out to my house at Streatham, carrying the jewel with me. ⁹⁴I did not breathe freely until I had taken it upstairs and locked it in the bureau of my dressing-room.

⁹⁵“And now a word as to my household, Mr. Holmes, for I wish you to thoroughly understand the situation. ⁹⁶My groom and my page sleep out of the house, and may be set aside altogether. ⁹⁷I have three maid-servants who have been with me a number of years and whose absolute reliability is quite above suspicion. ⁹⁸Another, Lucy Parr, the second waiting-maid, has only been in my service a few months. ⁹⁹She came with an excellent character, however, and has always given me satisfaction. ¹⁰⁰She is a very pretty girl and has attracted admirers who have occasionally hung about the place. ¹⁰¹That is the only drawback which we have found to her, but we believe her to be a thoroughly good girl in every way.

¹⁰²“So much for the servants. ¹⁰³My family itself is so small that it will not take me long to describe it.

¹⁰⁴I am a widower and have an only son, Arthur. ¹⁰⁵He has been a disappointment to me, Mr. Holmes—a grievous disappointment. ¹⁰⁶I have no doubt that I am myself to blame. ¹⁰⁷People tell me that I have

spoiled him. ¹⁰⁸Very likely I have. ¹⁰⁹When my dear wife died I felt that he was all I had to love. ¹¹⁰I could not bear to see the smile fade even for a moment from his face. ¹¹¹I have never denied him a wish. ¹¹²Perhaps it would have been better for both of us had I been sterner, but I meant it for the best.

¹¹³“It was naturally my intention that he should succeed me in my business, but he was not of a business turn. ¹¹⁴He was wild, wayward, and, to speak the truth, I could not trust him in the handling of large sums of money. ¹¹⁵When 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. ¹¹⁶He 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. ¹¹⁷He 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.

¹¹⁸“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. ¹¹⁹He 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. ¹²⁰Yet 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. ¹²¹So I think, and so, too, thinks my little Mary, who has a woman's quick insight into character.

¹²²“And now there is only she to be described. ¹²³She 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. ¹²⁴She 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. ¹²⁵She is my right hand. ¹²⁶I do not know what I could do without her. ¹²⁷In only one matter has she ever gone against my wishes. ¹²⁸Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, for he loves her devotedly, but each time she has refused him. ¹²⁹I 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!

¹³⁰“Now, Mr. Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof, and I shall continue with my miserable story.

¹³¹“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. ¹³²Lucy Parr, who had brought in the coffee, had, I am sure, left the room; but I cannot swear that the door was closed. ¹³³Mary and Arthur were much interested and wished to see the famous coronet, but I thought it better not to disturb it.

¹³⁴“‘Where have you put it?’ asked Arthur.

¹³⁵“‘In my own bureau.’

¹³⁶“‘Well, I hope to goodness the house won't be burgled during the night.’ said he.

¹³⁷“‘It is locked up,’ I answered.

¹³⁸“‘Oh, any old key will fit that bureau. ¹³⁹When I was a youngster I have opened it myself with the key of the box-room cupboard.’

¹⁴⁰“He often had a wild way of talking, so that I thought little of what he said. ¹⁴¹He followed me to my room, however, that night with a very grave face.

¹⁴²“‘Look here, dad,’ said he with his eyes cast down, ‘can you let me have £200?’

¹⁴³“No, I cannot!” I answered sharply. ¹⁴⁴“I have been far too generous with you in money matters.”

¹⁴⁵“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.”

¹⁴⁶“And a very good thing, too!” I cried.

¹⁴⁷“Yes, but you would not have me leave it a dishonoured man,” said he. ¹⁴⁸“I could not bear the disgrace. ¹⁴⁹I must raise the money in some way, and if you will not let me have it, then I must try other means.”

¹⁵⁰“I was very angry, for this was the third demand during the month. ¹⁵¹“You shall not have a farthing from me,” I cried, on which he bowed and left the room without another word.

¹⁵²“When he was gone I unlocked my bureau, made sure that my treasure was safe, and locked it again.

¹⁵³Then 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. ¹⁵⁴As I came down the stairs I saw Mary herself at the side window of the hall, which she closed and fastened as I approached.

¹⁵⁵“Tell me, dad,” said she, looking, I thought, a little disturbed, “did you give Lucy, the maid, leave to go out to-night?”

¹⁵⁶“Certainly not.”

¹⁵⁷“She came in just now by the back door. ¹⁵⁸I 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.”

¹⁵⁹“You must speak to her in the morning, or I will if you prefer it. ¹⁶⁰Are you sure that everything is fastened?”

¹⁶¹“Quite sure, dad.”

¹⁶²“Then, good-night.” ¹⁶³I kissed her and went up to my bedroom again, where I was soon asleep.

¹⁶⁴“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.”

¹⁶⁵“On the contrary, your statement is singularly lucid.”

¹⁶⁶“I come to a part of my story now in which I should wish to be particularly so. ¹⁶⁷I am not a very heavy sleeper, and the anxiety in my mind tended, no doubt, to make me even less so than usual.

¹⁶⁸About two in the morning, then, I was awakened by some sound in the house. ¹⁶⁹It had ceased ere I was wide awake, but it had left an impression behind it as though a window had gently closed somewhere. ¹⁷⁰I lay listening with all my ears. ¹⁷¹Suddenly, to my horror, there was a distinct sound of footsteps moving softly in the next room. ¹⁷²I slipped out of bed, all palpitating with fear, and peeped round the corner of my dressing-room door.

¹⁷³“Arthur!” I screamed, “you villain! you thief! ¹⁷⁴How dare you touch that coronet?”

¹⁷⁵“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. ¹⁷⁶He appeared to be wrenching at it, or bending it with all his strength. ¹⁷⁷At my cry he dropped it from his grasp and turned as pale as death.

¹⁷⁸I snatched it up and examined it. ¹⁷⁹One of the gold corners, with three of the beryls in it, was missing.

¹⁸⁰“You blackguard!” I shouted, beside myself with rage. ¹⁸¹“You have destroyed it! ¹⁸²You have dishonoured me forever! ¹⁸³Where are the jewels which you have stolen?”

¹⁸⁴“Stolen!” he cried.

¹⁸⁵“‘Yes, thief!’ I roared, shaking him by the shoulder.

¹⁸⁶“‘There are none missing. ¹⁸⁷There cannot be any missing,’ said he.

¹⁸⁸“‘There are three missing. ¹⁸⁹And you know where they are. ¹⁹⁰Must I call you a liar as well as a thief?

¹⁹¹Did I not see you trying to tear off another piece?’

¹⁹²“‘You have called me names enough,’ said he, ‘I will not stand it any longer. ¹⁹³I shall not say another word about this business, since you have chosen to insult me. ¹⁹⁴I will leave your house in the morning and make my own way in the world.’

¹⁹⁵“‘You shall leave it in the hands of the police!’ I cried half-mad with grief and rage. ¹⁹⁶‘I shall have this matter probed to the bottom.’

¹⁹⁷“‘You shall learn nothing from me,’ said he with a passion such as I should not have thought was in his nature. ¹⁹⁸‘If you choose to call the police, let the police find what they can.’

¹⁹⁹“By this time the whole house was astir, for I had raised my voice in my anger. ²⁰⁰Mary 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. ²⁰¹I sent the house-maid for the police and put the investigation into their hands at once. ²⁰²When 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. ²⁰³I answered that it had ceased to be a private matter, but had become a public one, since the ruined coronet was national property. ²⁰⁴I was determined that the law should have its way in everything.

²⁰⁵“‘At least,’ said he, ‘you will not have me arrested at once. ²⁰⁶It would be to your advantage as well as mine if I might leave the house for five minutes.’

²⁰⁷“‘That you may get away, or perhaps that you may conceal what you have stolen,’ said I. ²⁰⁸And 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. ²⁰⁹He might avert it all if he would but tell me what he had done with the three missing stones.

²¹⁰“‘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. ²¹¹If you but make such reparation as is in your power, by telling us where the beryls are, all shall be forgiven and forgotten.’

²¹²“‘Keep your forgiveness for those who ask for it,’ he answered, turning away from me with a sneer. ²¹³I saw that he was too hardened for any words of mine to influence him. ²¹⁴There was but one way for it. ²¹⁵I called in the inspector and gave him into custody. ²¹⁶A 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. ²¹⁷This 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. ²¹⁸The police have openly confessed that they can at present make nothing of it. ²¹⁹You may go to any expense which you think necessary. ²²⁰I have already offered a reward of £1000. ²²¹My God, what shall I do! ²²²I have lost my honour, my gems, and my son in one night. ²²³Oh, what shall I do!”

²²⁴He 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.

²²⁵Sherlock Holmes sat silent for some few minutes, with his brows knitted and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

²²⁶“Do you receive much company?” he asked.

²²⁷“None save my partner with his family and an occasional friend of Arthur's. ²²⁸Sir George Burnwell has been several times lately. ²²⁹No one else, I think.”

²³⁰“Do you go out much in society?”

²³¹“Arthur does. ²³²Mary and I stay at home. ²³³We neither of us care for it.”

²³⁴“That is unusual in a young girl.”

²³⁵“She is of a quiet nature. ²³⁶Besides, she is not so very young. ²³⁷She is four-and-twenty.”

²³⁸“This matter, from what you say, seems to have been a shock to her also.”

²³⁹“Terrible! ²⁴⁰She is even more affected than I.”

²⁴¹“You have neither of you any doubt as to your son's guilt?”

²⁴²“How can we have when I saw him with my own eyes with the coronet in his hands.”

²⁴³“I hardly consider that a conclusive proof. ²⁴⁴Was the remainder of the coronet at all injured?”

²⁴⁵“Yes, it was twisted.”

²⁴⁶“Do you not think, then, that he might have been trying to straighten it?”

²⁴⁷“God bless you! ²⁴⁸You are doing what you can for him and for me. ²⁴⁹But it is too heavy a task. ²⁵⁰What was he doing there at all? ²⁵¹If his purpose were innocent, why did he not say so?”

²⁵²“Precisely. ²⁵³And if it were guilty, why did he not invent a lie? ²⁵⁴His silence appears to me to cut both ways. ²⁵⁵There are several singular points about the case. ²⁵⁶What did the police think of the noise which awoke you from your sleep?”

²⁵⁷“They considered that it might be caused by Arthur's closing his bedroom door.”

²⁵⁸“A likely story! ²⁵⁹As if a man bent on felony would slam his door so as to wake a household. ²⁶⁰What did they say, then, of the disappearance of these gems?”

²⁶¹“They are still sounding the planking and probing the furniture in the hope of finding them.”

²⁶²“Have they thought of looking outside the house?”

²⁶³“Yes, they have shown extraordinary energy. ²⁶⁴The whole garden has already been minutely examined.”

²⁶⁵“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? ²⁶⁶It appeared to you to be a simple case; to me it seems exceedingly complex. ²⁶⁷Consider what is involved by your theory. ²⁶⁸You 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. ²⁶⁹I ask you now, is such a theory tenable?”

²⁷⁰“But what other is there?” cried the banker with a gesture of despair. ²⁷¹“If his motives were innocent, why does he not explain them?”

²⁷²“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.”

²⁷³My 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. ²⁷⁴I 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. ²⁷⁵He 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. ²⁷⁶Our 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. ²⁷⁷A short railway journey and a shorter walk brought us to Fairbank, the modest residence of the great financier.

²⁷⁸Fairbank was a good-sized square house of white stone, standing back a little from the road. ²⁷⁹A double carriage-sweep, with a snow-clad lawn, stretched down in front to two large iron gates which closed the entrance. ²⁸⁰On 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. ²⁸¹On 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. ²⁸²Holmes 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. ²⁸³So long was he that Mr. Holder and I went into the dining-room and waited by the fire until he should return. ²⁸⁴We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and a young lady came in. ²⁸⁵She was rather above the middle height, slim, with dark hair and eyes, which seemed the darker against the absolute pallor of her skin. ²⁸⁶I do not think that I have ever seen such deadly paleness in a woman's face. ²⁸⁷Her lips, too, were bloodless, but her eyes were flushed with crying. ²⁸⁸As 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. ²⁸⁹Disregarding my presence, she went straight to her uncle and passed her hand over his head with a sweet womanly caress.

²⁹⁰"You have given orders that Arthur should be liberated, have you not, dad?" she asked.

²⁹¹"No, no, my girl, the matter must be probed to the bottom."

²⁹²"But I am so sure that he is innocent. ²⁹³You know what woman's instincts are. ²⁹⁴I know that he has done no harm and that you will be sorry for having acted so harshly."

²⁹⁵"Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?"

²⁹⁶"Who knows? ²⁹⁷Perhaps because he was so angry that you should suspect him."

²⁹⁸"How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with the coronet in his hand?"

²⁹⁹"Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. ³⁰⁰Oh, do, do take my word for it that he is innocent.

³⁰¹Let the matter drop and say no more. ³⁰²It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in a prison!"

³⁰³"I shall never let it drop until the gems are found—never, Mary! ³⁰⁴Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences to me. ³⁰⁵Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman down from London to inquire more deeply into it."

³⁰⁶"This gentleman?" she asked, facing round to me.

³⁰⁷"No, his friend. ³⁰⁸He wished us to leave him alone. ³⁰⁹He is round in the stable lane now."

³¹⁰"The stable lane?" ³¹¹She raised her dark eyebrows. ³¹²"What can he hope to find there? ³¹³Ah! this, I suppose, is he. ³¹⁴I trust, sir, that you will succeed in proving, what I feel sure is the truth, that my cousin Arthur is innocent of this crime."

³¹⁵“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. ³¹⁶“I believe I have the honour of addressing Miss Mary Holder. ³¹⁷Might I ask you a question or two?”

³¹⁸“Pray do, sir, if it may help to clear this horrible affair up.”

³¹⁹“You heard nothing yourself last night?”

³²⁰“Nothing, until my uncle here began to speak loudly. ³²¹I heard that, and I came down.”

³²²“You shut up the windows and doors the night before. ³²³Did you fasten all the windows?”

³²⁴“Yes.”

³²⁵“Were they all fastened this morning?”

³²⁶“Yes.”

³²⁷“You have a maid who has a sweetheart? ³²⁸I think that you remarked to your uncle last night that she had been out to see him?”

³²⁹“Yes, and she was the girl who waited in the drawing-room, and who may have heard uncle's remarks about the coronet.”

³³⁰“I see. ³³¹You infer that she may have gone out to tell her sweetheart, and that the two may have planned the robbery.”

³³²“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?”

³³³“Wait a little, Mr. Holder. ³³⁴We must come back to that. ³³⁵About this girl, Miss Holder. ³³⁶You saw her return by the kitchen door, I presume?”

³³⁷“Yes; when I went to see if the door was fastened for the night I met her slipping in. ³³⁸I saw the man, too, in the gloom.”

³³⁹“Do you know him?”

³⁴⁰“Oh, yes! he is the green-grocer who brings our vegetables round. ³⁴¹His name is Francis Prosper.”

³⁴²“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?”

³⁴³“Yes, he did.”

³⁴⁴“And he is a man with a wooden leg?”

³⁴⁵Something like fear sprang up in the young lady's expressive black eyes. ³⁴⁶“Why, you are like a magician,” said she. ³⁴⁷“How do you know that?” ³⁴⁸She smiled, but there was no answering smile in Holmes' thin, eager face.

³⁴⁹“I should be very glad now to go upstairs,” said he. ³⁵⁰“I shall probably wish to go over the outside of the house again. ³⁵¹Perhaps I had better take a look at the lower windows before I go up.”

³⁵²He walked swiftly round from one to the other, pausing only at the large one which looked from the hall onto the stable lane. ³⁵³This he opened and made a very careful examination of the sill with his powerful magnifying lens. ³⁵⁴“Now we shall go upstairs,” said he at last.

³⁵⁵The banker's dressing-room was a plainly furnished little chamber, with a grey carpet, a large bureau, and a long mirror. ³⁵⁶Holmes went to the bureau first and looked hard at the lock.

³⁵⁷“Which key was used to open it?” he asked.

³⁵⁸“That which my son himself indicated—that of the cupboard of the lumber-room.”

³⁵⁹“Have you it here?”

³⁶⁰“That is it on the dressing-table.”

³⁶¹Sherlock Holmes took it up and opened the bureau.

³⁶²“It is a noiseless lock,” said he. ³⁶³“It is no wonder that it did not wake you. ³⁶⁴This case, I presume, contains the coronet. ³⁶⁵We must have a look at it.” ³⁶⁶He opened the case, and taking out the diadem he laid it upon the table. ³⁶⁷It was a magnificent specimen of the jeweller's art, and the thirty-six stones were the finest that I have ever seen. ³⁶⁸At one side of the coronet was a cracked edge, where a corner holding three gems had been torn away.

³⁶⁹“Now, Mr. Holder,” said Holmes, “here is the corner which corresponds to that which has been so unfortunately lost. ³⁷⁰Might I beg that you will break it off.”

³⁷¹The banker recoiled in horror. ³⁷²“I should not dream of trying,” said he.

³⁷³“Then I will.” ³⁷⁴Holmes suddenly bent his strength upon it, but without result. ³⁷⁵“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. ³⁷⁶An ordinary man could not do it. ³⁷⁷Now, what do you think would happen if I did break it, Mr. Holder? ³⁷⁸There would be a noise like a pistol shot. ³⁷⁹Do you tell me that all this happened within a few yards of your bed and that you heard nothing of it?”

³⁸⁰“I do not know what to think. ³⁸¹It is all dark to me.”

³⁸²“But perhaps it may grow lighter as we go. ³⁸³What do you think, Miss Holder?”

³⁸⁴“I confess that I still share my uncle's perplexity.”

³⁸⁵“Your son had no shoes or slippers on when you saw him?”

³⁸⁶“He had nothing on save only his trousers and shirt.”

³⁸⁷“Thank you. ³⁸⁸We 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. ³⁸⁹With your permission, Mr. Holder, I shall now continue my investigations outside.”

³⁹⁰He went alone, at his own request, for he explained that any unnecessary footmarks might make his task more difficult. ³⁹¹For an hour or more he was at work, returning at last with his feet heavy with snow and his features as inscrutable as ever.

³⁹²“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.”

³⁹³“But the gems, Mr. Holmes. ³⁹⁴Where are they?”

³⁹⁵“I cannot tell.”

³⁹⁶The banker wrung his hands. ³⁹⁷“I shall never see them again!” he cried. ³⁹⁸“And my son? ³⁹⁹You give me hopes?”

⁴⁰⁰“My opinion is in no way altered.”

⁴⁰¹“Then, for God's sake, what was this dark business which was acted in my house last night?”

⁴⁰²“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. ⁴⁰³I 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.”

⁴⁰⁴“I would give my fortune to have them back.”

⁴⁰⁵“Very good. ⁴⁰⁶I shall look into the matter between this and then. ⁴⁰⁷Good-bye; it is just possible that I may have to come over here again before evening.”

⁴⁰⁸It 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. ⁴⁰⁹Several 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. ⁴¹⁰It was not yet three when we found ourselves in our rooms once more. ⁴¹¹He hurried to his chamber and was down again in a few minutes dressed as a common loafer. ⁴¹²With his collar turned up, his shiny, seedy coat, his red cravat, and his worn boots, he was a perfect sample of the class.

⁴¹³“I think that this should do,” said he, glancing into the glass above the fireplace. ⁴¹⁴“I only wish that you could come with me, Watson, but I fear that it won't do. ⁴¹⁵I 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. ⁴¹⁶I hope that I may be back in a few hours.” ⁴¹⁷He 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.

⁴¹⁸I had just finished my tea when he returned, evidently in excellent spirits, swinging an old elastic-sided boot in his hand. ⁴¹⁹He chucked it down into a corner and helped himself to a cup of tea.

⁴²⁰“I only looked in as I passed,” said he. ⁴²¹“I am going right on.”

⁴²²“Where to?”

⁴²³“Oh, to the other side of the West End. ⁴²⁴It may be some time before I get back. ⁴²⁵Don't wait up for me in case I should be late.”

⁴²⁶“How are you getting on?”

⁴²⁷“Oh, so so. ⁴²⁸Nothing to complain of. ⁴²⁹I have been out to Streatham since I saw you last, but I did not call at the house. ⁴³⁰It is a very sweet little problem, and I would not have missed it for a good deal. ⁴³¹However, I must not sit gossiping here, but must get these disreputable clothes off and return to my highly respectable self.”

⁴³²I could see by his manner that he had stronger reasons for satisfaction than his words alone would imply. ⁴³³His eyes twinkled, and there was even a touch of colour upon his sallow cheeks. ⁴³⁴He 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.

⁴³⁵I waited until midnight, but there was no sign of his return, so I retired to my room. ⁴³⁶It 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. ⁴³⁷I 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.

⁴³⁸“You will excuse my beginning without you, Watson,” said he, “but you remember that our client has rather an early appointment this morning.”

⁴³⁹“Why, it is after nine now,” I answered. ⁴⁴⁰“I should not be surprised if that were he. ⁴⁴¹I thought I heard a ring.”

⁴⁴²It was, indeed, our friend the financier. ⁴⁴³I 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. ⁴⁴⁴He 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.

⁴⁴⁵"I do not know what I have done to be so severely tried," said he. ⁴⁴⁶"Only two days ago I was a happy and prosperous man, without a care in the world. ⁴⁴⁷Now I am left to a lonely and dishonoured age. ⁴⁴⁸One sorrow comes close upon the heels of another. ⁴⁴⁹My niece, Mary, has deserted me."

⁴⁵⁰"Deserted you?"

⁴⁵¹"Yes. ⁴⁵²Her bed this morning had not been slept in, her room was empty, and a note for me lay upon the hall table. ⁴⁵³I 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. ⁴⁵⁴Perhaps it was thoughtless of me to say so. ⁴⁵⁵It is to that remark that she refers in this note:

⁴⁵⁶"My dearest Uncle:

⁴⁵⁷"I feel that I have brought trouble upon you, and that if I had acted differently this terrible misfortune might never have occurred. ⁴⁵⁸I cannot, with this thought in my mind, ever again be happy under your roof, and I feel that I must leave you forever. ⁴⁵⁹Do 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. ⁴⁶⁰In life or in death, I am ever

⁴⁶¹"Your loving

⁴⁶²"Mary.'

⁴⁶³"What could she mean by that note, Mr. Holmes? ⁴⁶⁴Do you think it points to suicide?"

⁴⁶⁵"No, no, nothing of the kind. ⁴⁶⁶It is perhaps the best possible solution. ⁴⁶⁷I trust, Mr. Holder, that you are nearing the end of your troubles."

⁴⁶⁸"Ha! ⁴⁶⁹You say so! ⁴⁷⁰You have heard something, Mr. Holmes; you have learned something! ⁴⁷¹Where are the gems?"

⁴⁷²"You would not think £1000 pounds apiece an excessive sum for them?"

⁴⁷³"I would pay ten."

⁴⁷⁴"That would be unnecessary. ⁴⁷⁵Three thousand will cover the matter. ⁴⁷⁶And there is a little reward, I fancy. ⁴⁷⁷Have you your check-book? ⁴⁷⁸Here is a pen. ⁴⁷⁹Better make it out for £4000."

⁴⁸⁰With a dazed face the banker made out the required check. ⁴⁸¹Holmes 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.

⁴⁸²With a shriek of joy our client clutched it up.

⁴⁸³"You have it!" he gasped. ⁴⁸⁴"I am saved! ⁴⁸⁵I am saved!"

⁴⁸⁶The reaction of joy was as passionate as his grief had been, and he hugged his recovered gems to his bosom.

⁴⁸⁷"There is one other thing you owe, Mr. Holder," said Sherlock Holmes rather sternly.

⁴⁸⁸"Owe!" ⁴⁸⁹He caught up a pen. ⁴⁹⁰"Name the sum, and I will pay it."

⁴⁹¹“No, the debt is not to me. ⁴⁹²You 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.”

⁴⁹³“Then it was not Arthur who took them?”

⁴⁹⁴“I told you yesterday, and I repeat to-day, that it was not.”

⁴⁹⁵“You are sure of it! ⁴⁹⁶Then let us hurry to him at once to let him know that the truth is known.”

⁴⁹⁷“He knows it already. ⁴⁹⁸When 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. ⁴⁹⁹Your news of this morning, however, may open his lips.”

⁵⁰⁰“For heaven's sake, tell me, then, what is this extraordinary mystery!”

⁵⁰¹“I will do so, and I will show you the steps by which I reached it. ⁵⁰²And 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. ⁵⁰³They have now fled together.”

⁵⁰⁴“My Mary? ⁵⁰⁵Impossible!”

⁵⁰⁶“It is unfortunately more than possible; it is certain. ⁵⁰⁷Neither you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you admitted him into your family circle. ⁵⁰⁸He is one of the most dangerous men in England—a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience. ⁵⁰⁹Your niece knew nothing of such men. ⁵¹⁰When 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. ⁵¹¹The devil knows best what he said, but at least she became his tool and was in the habit of seeing him nearly every evening.”

⁵¹²“I cannot, and I will not, believe it!” cried the banker with an ashen face.

⁵¹³“I will tell you, then, what occurred in your house last night. ⁵¹⁴Your 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. ⁵¹⁵His footmarks had pressed right through the snow, so long had he stood there. ⁵¹⁶She told him of the coronet. ⁵¹⁷His wicked lust for gold kindled at the news, and he bent her to his will. ⁵¹⁸I 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. ⁵¹⁹She 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.

⁵²⁰“Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you but he slept badly on account of his uneasiness about his club debts. ⁵²¹In 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. ⁵²²Petrified with astonishment, the lad slipped on some clothes and waited there in the dark to see what would come of this strange affair. ⁵²³Presently 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. ⁵²⁴She 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. ⁵²⁵He 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.

⁵²⁶“As long as she was on the scene he could not take any action without a horrible exposure of the woman whom he loved. ⁵²⁷But 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. ⁵²⁸He 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. ⁵²⁹Sir 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. ⁵³⁰In the scuffle, your son struck Sir George and cut him over the eye. ⁵³¹Then 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.”

⁵³²“Is it possible?” gasped the banker.

⁵³³“You then roused his anger by calling him names at a moment when he felt that he had deserved your warmest thanks. ⁵³⁴He could not explain the true state of affairs without betraying one who certainly deserved little enough consideration at his hands. ⁵³⁵He took the more chivalrous view, however, and preserved her secret.”

⁵³⁶“And that was why she shrieked and fainted when she saw the coronet,” cried Mr. Holder. ⁵³⁷“Oh, my God! what a blind fool I have been! ⁵³⁸And his asking to be allowed to go out for five minutes! ⁵³⁹The dear fellow wanted to see if the missing piece were at the scene of the struggle. ⁵⁴⁰How cruelly I have misjudged him!”

⁵⁴¹“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. ⁵⁴²I knew that none had fallen since the evening before, and also that there had been a strong frost to preserve impressions. ⁵⁴³I passed along the tradesmen's path, but found it all trampled down and indistinguishable. ⁵⁴⁴Just 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. ⁵⁴⁵I 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. ⁵⁴⁶I 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. ⁵⁴⁷I 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.

⁵⁴⁸“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. ⁵⁴⁹I was at once convinced from what you had told me that the latter was your son. ⁵⁵⁰The 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. ⁵⁵¹I followed them up and found they led to the hall window, where Boots had worn all the snow away while waiting. ⁵⁵²Then I walked to the other end, which was a hundred yards or more down the lane. ⁵⁵³I 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. ⁵⁵⁴Boots had then run down the lane, and another little smudge of blood showed that it was he who had been hurt. ⁵⁵⁵When 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.

⁵⁵⁶“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. ⁵⁵⁷I could distinguish the outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in coming in. ⁵⁵⁸I was then beginning to be able to form an opinion as to what had occurred. ⁵⁵⁹A 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. ⁵⁶⁰He had returned with the prize, but had left a fragment in the grasp of his opponent. ⁵⁶¹So far I was clear. ⁵⁶²The question now was, who was the man and who was it brought him the coronet?

⁵⁶³“It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. ⁵⁶⁴Now, I knew that it was not you who had brought it down, so there only remained your niece and the maids. ⁵⁶⁵But if it were the maids, why should your son allow himself to be accused in their place? ⁵⁶⁶There could be no possible reason. ⁵⁶⁷As 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. ⁵⁶⁸When 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.

⁵⁶⁹“And who could it be who was her confederate? ⁵⁷⁰A lover evidently, for who else could outweigh the love and gratitude which she must feel to you? ⁵⁷¹I knew that you went out little, and that your circle of friends was a very limited one. ⁵⁷²But among them was Sir George Burnwell. I had heard of him before as being a man of evil reputation among women. ⁵⁷³It must have been he who wore those boots and retained the missing gems. ⁵⁷⁴Even 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.

⁵⁷⁵“Well, your own good sense will suggest what measures I took next. ⁵⁷⁶I 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. ⁵⁷⁷With these I journeyed down to Streatham and saw that they exactly fitted the tracks.”

⁵⁷⁸“I saw an ill-dressed vagabond in the lane yesterday evening,” said Mr. Holder.

⁵⁷⁹“Precisely. ⁵⁸⁰It was I. ⁵⁸¹I found that I had my man, so I came home and changed my clothes. ⁵⁸²It 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. ⁵⁸³I went and saw him. ⁵⁸⁴At first, of course, he denied everything. ⁵⁸⁵But when I gave him every particular that had occurred, he tried to bluster and took down a life-preserver from the wall. ⁵⁸⁶I knew my man, however, and I clapped a pistol to his head before he could strike. ⁵⁸⁷Then he became a little more reasonable. ⁵⁸⁸I told him that we would give him a price for the stones he held—£1000 apiece. ⁵⁸⁹That brought out the first signs of grief that he had shown. ⁵⁹⁰“Why, dash it all!” said he, ‘I've let them go at six hundred for the three!’ ⁵⁹¹I soon managed to get the address of the receiver who had them, on promising him that there would be no prosecution. ⁵⁹²Off I set to him, and after much chaffering I got our stones at 1000 pounds apiece. ⁵⁹³Then 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.”

⁵⁹⁴“A day which has saved England from a great public scandal,” said the banker, rising. ⁵⁹⁵“Sir, I cannot find words to thank you, but you shall not find me ungrateful for what you have done. ⁵⁹⁶Your skill has indeed exceeded all that I have heard of it. ⁵⁹⁷And now I must fly to my dear boy to apologise to him for the wrong which I have done him. ⁵⁹⁸As to what you tell me of poor Mary, it goes to my very heart. ⁵⁹⁹Not even your skill can inform me where she is now.”

⁶⁰⁰“I think that we may safely say,” returned Holmes, “that she is wherever Sir George Burnwell is. ⁶⁰¹It is equally certain, too, that whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than sufficient punishment.”

The Adventure of the Copper Beeches

¹“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. ²It 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.”

³“And yet,” said I, smiling, “I cannot quite hold myself absolved from the charge of sensationalism which has been urged against my records.”

⁴“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.”

⁵“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.

⁶“No, it is not selfishness or conceit,” said he, answering, as was his wont, my thoughts rather than my words. ⁷“If I claim full justice for my art, it is because it is an impersonal thing—a thing beyond myself. ⁸Crime is common. ⁹Logic is rare. ¹⁰Therefore it is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell. ¹¹You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.”

¹²It 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. ¹³A 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. ¹⁴Our gas was lit and shone on the white cloth and glimmer of china and metal, for the table had not been cleared yet. ¹⁵Sherlock 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.

¹⁶“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. ¹⁷The 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. ¹⁸But in avoiding the sensational, I fear that you may have bordered on the trivial.”

¹⁹“The end may have been so,” I answered, “but the methods I hold to have been novel and of interest.”

²⁰“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! ²¹But, indeed, if you are trivial, I cannot blame you, for the days of the great cases are past.

²²Man, or at least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality. ²³As 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. ²⁴I think that I have touched bottom at last, however. ²⁵This note I had this morning marks my zero-point, I fancy. ²⁶Read it!" ²⁷He tossed a crumpled letter across to me.

²⁸It was dated from Montague Place upon the preceding evening, and ran thus:

²⁹Dear Mr. Holmes:

³⁰I 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. ³¹I shall call at half-past ten to-morrow if I do not inconvenience you.

³²Yours faithfully,

³³Violet Hunter.

³⁴"Do you know the young lady?" I asked.

³⁵"Not I."

³⁶"It is half-past ten now."

³⁷"Yes, and I have no doubt that is her ring."

³⁸"It may turn out to be of more interest than you think. ³⁹You remember that the affair of the blue carbuncle, which appeared to be a mere whim at first, developed into a serious investigation. ⁴⁰It may be so in this case, also."

⁴¹"Well, let us hope so. ⁴²But our doubts will very soon be solved, for here, unless I am much mistaken, is the person in question."

⁴³As he spoke the door opened and a young lady entered the room. ⁴⁴She 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.

⁴⁵"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."

⁴⁶"Pray take a seat, Miss Hunter. ⁴⁷I shall be happy to do anything that I can to serve you."

⁴⁸I could see that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner and speech of his new client. ⁴⁹He 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.

⁵⁰"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. ⁵¹I advertised, and I answered advertisements, but without success. ⁵²At 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.

⁵³"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.

⁵⁴Westaway was the name of the founder of the business, but it is really managed by Miss Stoper. ⁵⁵She 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.

⁵⁶"Well, when I called last week I was shown into the little office as usual, but I found that Miss Stoper was not alone. ⁵⁷A 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. ⁵⁸As I came in he gave quite a jump in his chair and turned quickly to Miss Stoper.

⁵⁹“That will do,” said he; ‘I could not ask for anything better. ⁶⁰Capital! capital!’ ⁶¹He seemed quite enthusiastic and rubbed his hands together in the most genial fashion. ⁶²He was such a comfortable-looking man that it was quite a pleasure to look at him.

⁶³“You are looking for a situation, miss?” he asked.

⁶⁴“Yes, sir.”

⁶⁵“As governess?”

⁶⁶“Yes, sir.”

⁶⁷“And what salary do you ask?”

⁶⁸“I had £4 a month in my last place with Colonel Spence Munro.”

⁶⁹“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. ⁷⁰“How could anyone offer so pitiful a sum to a lady with such attractions and accomplishments?”

⁷¹“My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine,” said I. ⁷²“A little French, a little German, music, and drawing—”

⁷³“Tut, tut!” he cried. ⁷⁴“This is all quite beside the question. ⁷⁵The point is, have you or have you not the bearing and deportment of a lady? ⁷⁶There it is in a nutshell. ⁷⁷If 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. ⁷⁸But if you have why, then, how could any gentleman ask you to condescend to accept anything under the three figures? ⁷⁹Your salary with me, madam, would commence at £100 a year.”

⁸⁰“You may imagine, Mr. Holmes, that to me, destitute as I was, such an offer seemed almost too good to be true. ⁸¹The gentleman, however, seeing perhaps the look of incredulity upon my face, opened a pocket-book and took out a note.

⁸²“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.’

⁸³“It seemed to me that I had never met so fascinating and so thoughtful a man. ⁸⁴As 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.

⁸⁵“May I ask where you live, sir?” said I.

⁸⁶“Hampshire. ⁸⁷Charming rural place. ⁸⁸The Copper Beeches, five miles on the far side of Winchester.

⁸⁹It is the most lovely country, my dear young lady, and the dearest old country-house.”

⁹⁰“And my duties, sir? ⁹¹I should be glad to know what they would be.”

⁹²“One child—one dear little romper just six years old. ⁹³Oh, if you could see him killing cockroaches with a slipper! ⁹⁴Smack! smack! smack! ⁹⁵Three gone before you could wink!’ ⁹⁶He leaned back in his chair and laughed his eyes into his head again.

⁹⁷“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.

⁹⁸“‘My sole duties, then,’ I asked, ‘are to take charge of a single child?’

⁹⁹“‘No, no, not the sole, not the sole, my dear young lady,’ he cried. ¹⁰⁰‘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. ¹⁰¹You see no difficulty, heh?’

¹⁰²“‘I should be happy to make myself useful.’

¹⁰³“‘Quite so. ¹⁰⁴In dress now, for example. ¹⁰⁵We are faddy people, you know—faddy but kind-hearted. ¹⁰⁶If you were asked to wear any dress which we might give you, you would not object to our little whim. ¹⁰⁷Heh?’

¹⁰⁸“‘No,’ said I, considerably astonished at his words.

¹⁰⁹“‘Or to sit here, or sit there, that would not be offensive to you?’

¹¹⁰“‘Oh, no.’

¹¹¹“‘Or to cut your hair quite short before you come to us?’

¹¹²“‘I could hardly believe my ears. ¹¹³As you may observe, Mr. Holmes, my hair is somewhat luxuriant, and of a rather peculiar tint of chestnut. ¹¹⁴It has been considered artistic. ¹¹⁵I could not dream of sacrificing it in this offhand fashion.

¹¹⁶“‘I am afraid that that is quite impossible,’ said I. ¹¹⁷He had been watching me eagerly out of his small eyes, and I could see a shadow pass over his face as I spoke.

¹¹⁸“‘I am afraid that it is quite essential,’ said he. ¹¹⁹‘It is a little fancy of my wife’s, and ladies’ fancies, you know, madam, ladies’ fancies must be consulted. ¹²⁰And so you won’t cut your hair?’

¹²¹“‘No, sir, I really could not,’ I answered firmly.

¹²²“‘Ah, very well; then that quite settles the matter. ¹²³It is a pity, because in other respects you would really have done very nicely. ¹²⁴In that case, Miss Stoper, I had best inspect a few more of your young ladies.’

¹²⁵“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.

¹²⁶“‘Do you desire your name to be kept upon the books?’ she asked.

¹²⁷“‘If you please, Miss Stoper.’

¹²⁸“‘Well, really, it seems rather useless, since you refuse the most excellent offers in this fashion,’ said she sharply. ¹²⁹‘You can hardly expect us to exert ourselves to find another such opening for you. ¹³⁰Good-day to you, Miss Hunter.’ ¹³¹She struck a gong upon the table, and I was shown out by the page.

¹³²“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. ¹³³I began to ask myself whether I had not done a very foolish thing. ¹³⁴After 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. ¹³⁵Very few governesses in England are getting £100 a year. ¹³⁶Besides, what use was my hair to me? ¹³⁷Many people are improved by wearing it short and perhaps I should be among the number. ¹³⁸Next day I was inclined to think that I had made a mistake, and by the day after I was sure of it. ¹³⁹I 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. ¹⁴⁰I have it here and I will read it to you:

¹⁴¹“The Copper Beeches, near Winchester.

¹⁴²“Dear Miss Hunter:

¹⁴³“Miss Stoper has very kindly given me your address, and I write from here to ask you whether you have reconsidered your decision. ¹⁴⁴My wife is very anxious that you should come, for she has been much attracted by my description of you. ¹⁴⁵We are willing to give £30 a quarter, or £120 a year, so as to recompense you for any little inconvenience which our fads may cause you. ¹⁴⁶They are not very exacting, after all. ¹⁴⁷My wife is fond of a particular shade of electric blue and would like you to wear such a dress indoors in the morning. ¹⁴⁸You 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. ¹⁴⁹Then, as to sitting here or there, or amusing yourself in any manner indicated, that need cause you no inconvenience. ¹⁵⁰As 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. ¹⁵¹Your duties, as far as the child is concerned, are very light. ¹⁵²Now do try to come, and I shall meet you with the dog-cart at Winchester. ¹⁵³Let me know your train.

¹⁵⁴“Yours faithfully,

¹⁵⁵“Jephro Rucastle.’

¹⁵⁶“That is the letter which I have just received, Mr. Holmes, and my mind is made up that I will accept it. ¹⁵⁷I thought, however, that before taking the final step I should like to submit the whole matter to your consideration.”

¹⁵⁸“Well, Miss Hunter, if your mind is made up, that settles the question,” said Holmes, smiling.

¹⁵⁹“But you would not advise me to refuse?”

¹⁶⁰“I confess that it is not the situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for.”

¹⁶¹“What is the meaning of it all, Mr. Holmes?”

¹⁶²“Ah, I have no data. ¹⁶³I cannot tell. ¹⁶⁴Perhaps you have yourself formed some opinion?”

¹⁶⁵“Well, there seems to me to be only one possible solution. ¹⁶⁶Mr. Rucastle seemed to be a very kind, good-natured man. ¹⁶⁷Is 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?”

¹⁶⁸“That is a possible solution—in fact, as matters stand, it is the most probable one. ¹⁶⁹But in any case it does not seem to be a nice household for a young lady.”

¹⁷⁰“But the money, Mr. Holmes, the money!”

¹⁷¹“Well, yes, of course the pay is good—too good. ¹⁷²That is what makes me uneasy. ¹⁷³Why should they give you £120 a year, when they could have their pick for £40? ¹⁷⁴There must be some strong reason behind.”

¹⁷⁵“I thought that if I told you the circumstances you would understand afterwards if I wanted your help.

¹⁷⁶I should feel so much stronger if I felt that you were at the back of me.”

¹⁷⁷“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. ¹⁷⁸There is something distinctly novel about some of the features. ¹⁷⁹If you should find yourself in doubt or in danger—”

¹⁸⁰“Danger! ¹⁸¹What danger do you foresee?”

¹⁸²Holmes shook his head gravely. ¹⁸³"It would cease to be a danger if we could define it," said he. ¹⁸⁴"But at any time, day or night, a telegram would bring me down to your help."

¹⁸⁵"That is enough." ¹⁸⁶She rose briskly from her chair with the anxiety all swept from her face. ¹⁸⁷"I shall go down to Hampshire quite easy in my mind now. ¹⁸⁸I shall write to Mr. Rucastle at once, sacrifice my poor hair to-night, and start for Winchester to-morrow." ¹⁸⁹With a few grateful words to Holmes she bade us both good-night and bustled off upon her way.

¹⁹⁰"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."

¹⁹¹"And she would need to be," said Holmes gravely. ¹⁹²"I am much mistaken if we do not hear from her before many days are past."

¹⁹³It was not very long before my friend's prediction was fulfilled. ¹⁹⁴A 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. ¹⁹⁵The 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. ¹⁹⁶As 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. ¹⁹⁷"Data! data! data!" he cried impatiently. ¹⁹⁸"I can't make bricks without clay." ¹⁹⁹And yet he would always wind up by muttering that no sister of his should ever have accepted such a situation.

²⁰⁰The 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. ²⁰¹He opened the yellow envelope, and then, glancing at the message, threw it across to me.

²⁰²"Just look up the trains in Bradshaw," said he, and turned back to his chemical studies.

²⁰³The summons was a brief and urgent one.

²⁰⁴Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday to-morrow [it said]. ²⁰⁵Do come! ²⁰⁶I am at my wit's end.

²⁰⁷Hunter.

²⁰⁸"Will you come with me?" asked Holmes, glancing up.

²⁰⁹"I should wish to."

²¹⁰"Just look it up, then."

²¹¹"There is a train at half-past nine," said I, glancing over my Bradshaw. ²¹²"It is due at Winchester at 11.30."

²¹³"That will do very nicely. ²¹⁴Then perhaps I had better postpone my analysis of the acetones, as we may need to be at our best in the morning."

²¹⁵By eleven o'clock the next day we were well upon our way to the old English capital. ²¹⁶Holmes 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. ²¹⁷It was an ideal spring day, a light blue sky, flecked with little fleecy white clouds drifting across from west to east. ²¹⁸The sun was shining very brightly, and yet there was an exhilarating nip in the air, which set an edge to a man's energy. ²¹⁹All 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.

²²⁰“Are they not fresh and beautiful?” I cried with all the enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street.

²²¹But Holmes shook his head gravely.

²²²“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. ²²³You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. ²²⁴I 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.”

²²⁵“Good heavens!” I cried. ²²⁶“Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?”

²²⁷“They always fill me with a certain horror. ²²⁸It 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.”

²²⁹“You horrify me!”

²³⁰“But the reason is very obvious. ²³¹The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. ²³²There 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. ²³³But 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. ²³⁴Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. ²³⁵Had this lady who appeals to us for help gone to live in Winchester, I should never have had a fear for her. ²³⁶It is the five miles of country which makes the danger. ²³⁷Still, it is clear that she is not personally threatened.”

²³⁸“No. ²³⁹If she can come to Winchester to meet us she can get away.”

²⁴⁰“Quite so. ²⁴¹She has her freedom.”

²⁴²“What can be the matter, then? ²⁴³Can you suggest no explanation?”

²⁴⁴“I have devised seven separate explanations, each of which would cover the facts as far as we know them. ²⁴⁵But which of these is correct can only be determined by the fresh information which we shall no doubt find waiting for us. ²⁴⁶Well, there is the tower of the cathedral, and we shall soon learn all that Miss Hunter has to tell.”

²⁴⁷The 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. ²⁴⁸She had engaged a sitting-room, and our lunch awaited us upon the table.

²⁴⁹“I am so delighted that you have come,” she said earnestly. ²⁵⁰“It is so very kind of you both; but indeed I do not know what I should do. ²⁵¹Your advice will be altogether invaluable to me.”

²⁵²“Pray tell us what has happened to you.”

²⁵³“I will do so, and I must be quick, for I have promised Mr. Rucastle to be back before three. ²⁵⁴I got his leave to come into town this morning, though he little knew for what purpose.”

²⁵⁵“Let us have everything in its due order.” ²⁵⁶Holmes thrust his long thin legs out towards the fire and composed himself to listen.

²⁵⁷“In the first place, I may say that I have met, on the whole, with no actual ill-treatment from Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle. ²⁵⁸It is only fair to them to say that. ²⁵⁹But I cannot understand them, and I am not easy in my mind about them.”

²⁶⁰“What can you not understand?”

²⁶¹“Their reasons for their conduct. ²⁶²But you shall have it all just as it occurred. ²⁶³When I came down, Mr. Rucastle met me here and drove me in his dog-cart to the Copper Beeches. ²⁶⁴It 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. ²⁶⁵There 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. ²⁶⁶This ground in front belongs to the house, but the woods all round are part of Lord Southerton's preserves. ²⁶⁷A clump of copper beeches immediately in front of the hall door has given its name to the place.

²⁶⁸“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. ²⁶⁹There was no truth, Mr. Holmes, in the conjecture which seemed to us to be probable in your rooms at Baker Street. ²⁷⁰Mrs. 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. ²⁷¹From 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. ²⁷²Mr. Rucastle told me in private that the reason why she had left them was that she had an unreasoning aversion to her stepmother. ²⁷³As 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.

²⁷⁴“Mrs. Rucastle seemed to me to be colourless in mind as well as in feature. ²⁷⁵She impressed me neither favourably nor the reverse. ²⁷⁶She was a nonentity. ²⁷⁷It was easy to see that she was passionately devoted both to her husband and to her little son. ²⁷⁸Her light grey eyes wandered continually from one to the other, noting every little want and forestalling it if possible. ²⁷⁹He was kind to her also in his bluff, boisterous fashion, and on the whole they seemed to be a happy couple. ²⁸⁰And yet she had some secret sorrow, this woman. ²⁸¹She would often be lost in deep thought, with the saddest look upon her face. ²⁸²More than once I have surprised her in tears. ²⁸³I 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. ²⁸⁴He is small for his age, with a head which is quite disproportionately large. ²⁸⁵His whole life appears to be spent in an alternation between savage fits of passion and gloomy intervals of sulking. ²⁸⁶Giving 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. ²⁸⁷But I would rather not talk about the creature, Mr. Holmes, and, indeed, he has little to do with my story.”

²⁸⁸“I am glad of all details,” remarked my friend, “whether they seem to you to be relevant or not.”

²⁸⁹“I shall try not to miss anything of importance. ²⁹⁰The one unpleasant thing about the house, which struck me at once, was the appearance and conduct of the servants. ²⁹¹There are only two, a man and his wife. ²⁹²Toller, for that is his name, is a rough, uncouth man, with grizzled hair and whiskers, and a perpetual smell of drink. ²⁹³Twice since I have been with them he has been quite drunk, and yet Mr. Rucastle seemed to take no notice of it. ²⁹⁴His wife is a very tall and strong woman with a sour face, as silent as Mrs. Rucastle and much less amiable. ²⁹⁵They 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.

²⁹⁶“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.

²⁹⁷“‘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. ²⁹⁸I assure you that it has not detracted in the tiniest iota from your appearance. ²⁹⁹We shall now see how the electric-blue dress will become you. ³⁰⁰You 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.’

³⁰¹“The dress which I found waiting for me was of a peculiar shade of blue. ³⁰²It was of excellent material, a sort of beige, but it bore unmistakable signs of having been worn before. ³⁰³It could not have been a better fit if I had been measured for it. ³⁰⁴Both Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle expressed a delight at the look of it, which seemed quite exaggerated in its vehemence. ³⁰⁵They 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. ³⁰⁶A chair had been placed close to the central window, with its back turned towards it. ³⁰⁷In 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. ³⁰⁸You cannot imagine how comical he was, and I laughed until I was quite weary. ³⁰⁹Mrs. 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. ³¹⁰After 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.

³¹¹“Two days later this same performance was gone through under exactly similar circumstances. ³¹²Again 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 repertoire, and which he told inimitably. ³¹³Then 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. ³¹⁴I 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.

³¹⁵“You can easily imagine, Mr. Holmes, how curious I became as to what the meaning of this extraordinary performance could possibly be. ³¹⁶They 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. ³¹⁷At first it seemed to be impossible, but I soon devised a means. ³¹⁸My hand-mirror had been broken, so a happy thought seized me, and I concealed a piece of the glass in my handkerchief. ³¹⁹On 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. ³²⁰I confess that I was disappointed. ³²¹There was nothing. ³²²At least that was my first impression. ³²³At 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. ³²⁴The road is an important highway, and there are usually people there. ³²⁵This man, however, was leaning against the railings which bordered our field and was looking earnestly up. ³²⁶I lowered my handkerchief and glanced at Mrs. Rucastle to find her eyes fixed upon me with a most searching gaze. ³²⁷She 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. ³²⁸She rose at once.

³²⁹“‘Jephro,’ said she, ‘there is an impertinent fellow upon the road there who stares up at Miss Hunter.’

³³⁰“‘No friend of yours, Miss Hunter?’ he asked.

³³¹“‘No, I know no one in these parts.’

³³²“‘Dear me! ³³³How very impertinent! ³³⁴Kindly turn round and motion to him to go away.’

³³⁵“‘Surely it would be better to take no notice.’

³³⁶“No, no, we should have him loitering here always. ³³⁷Kindly turn round and wave him away like that.’

³³⁸“I did as I was told, and at the same instant Mrs. Rucastle drew down the blind. ³³⁹That 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.”

³⁴⁰“Pray continue,” said Holmes. ³⁴¹“Your narrative promises to be a most interesting one.”

³⁴²“You will find it rather disconnected, I fear, and there may prove to be little relation between the different incidents of which I speak. ³⁴³On 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. ³⁴⁴As we approached it I heard the sharp rattling of a chain, and the sound as of a large animal moving about.

³⁴⁵“Look in here!’ said Mr. Rucastle, showing me a slit between two planks. ³⁴⁶‘Is he not a beauty?’

³⁴⁷“I looked through and was conscious of two glowing eyes, and of a vague figure huddled up in the darkness.

³⁴⁸“Don't be frightened,’ said my employer, laughing at the start which I had given. ³⁴⁹‘It's only Carlo, my mastiff. ³⁵⁰I call him mine, but really old Toller, my groom, is the only man who can do anything with him. ³⁵¹We feed him once a day, and not too much then, so that he is always as keen as mustard. ³⁵²Toller lets him loose every night, and God help the trespasser whom he lays his fangs upon. ³⁵³For 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.’

³⁵⁴“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. ³⁵⁵It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the lawn in front of the house was silvered over and almost as bright as day. ³⁵⁶I 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. ³⁵⁷As it emerged into the moonshine I saw what it was. ³⁵⁸It was a giant dog, as large as a calf, tawny tinted, with hanging jowl, black muzzle, and huge projecting bones. ³⁵⁹It walked slowly across the lawn and vanished into the shadow upon the other side. ³⁶⁰That dreadful sentinel sent a chill to my heart which I do not think that any burglar could have done.

³⁶¹“And now I have a very strange experience to tell you. ³⁶²I 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. ³⁶³One 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. ³⁶⁴There was an old chest of drawers in the room, the two upper ones empty and open, the lower one locked. ³⁶⁵I 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. ³⁶⁶It 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. ³⁶⁷The very first key fitted to perfection, and I drew the drawer open. ³⁶⁸There was only one thing in it, but I am sure that you would never guess what it was. ³⁶⁹It was my coil of hair.

³⁷⁰“I took it up and examined it. ³⁷¹It was of the same peculiar tint, and the same thickness. ³⁷²But then the impossibility of the thing obtruded itself upon me. ³⁷³How could my hair have been locked in the drawer? ³⁷⁴With trembling hands I undid my trunk, turned out the contents, and drew from the bottom my own hair. ³⁷⁵I laid the two tresses together, and I assure you that they were identical. ³⁷⁶Was it not extraordinary? ³⁷⁷Puzzle as I would, I could make nothing at all of what it meant. ³⁷⁸I 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.

³⁷⁹“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. ³⁸⁰There was one wing, however, which appeared not to be inhabited at

all. ³⁸¹A door which faced that which led into the quarters of the Tollers opened into this suite, but it was invariably locked. ³⁸²One 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. ³⁸³His cheeks were red, his brow was all crinkled with anger, and the veins stood out at his temples with passion. ³⁸⁴He locked the door and hurried past me without a word or a look.

³⁸⁵“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. ³⁸⁶There were four of them in a row, three of which were simply dirty, while the fourth was shuttered up. ³⁸⁷They were evidently all deserted. ³⁸⁸As I strolled up and down, glancing at them occasionally, Mr. Rucastle came out to me, looking as merry and jovial as ever.

³⁸⁹“‘Ah!’ said he, ‘you must not think me rude if I passed you without a word, my dear young lady. ³⁹⁰I was preoccupied with business matters.’

³⁹¹“I assured him that I was not offended. ³⁹²‘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.’

³⁹³“He looked surprised and, as it seemed to me, a little startled at my remark.

³⁹⁴“‘Photography is one of my hobbies,’ said he. ³⁹⁵‘I have made my dark room up there. ³⁹⁶But, dear me! what an observant young lady we have come upon. ³⁹⁷Who would have believed it? ³⁹⁸Who would have ever believed it?’ ³⁹⁹He spoke in a jesting tone, but there was no jest in his eyes as he looked at me. ⁴⁰⁰I read suspicion there and annoyance, but no jest.

⁴⁰¹“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. ⁴⁰²It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. ⁴⁰³It was more a feeling of duty—a feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place. ⁴⁰⁴They talk of woman's instinct; perhaps it was woman's instinct which gave me that feeling. ⁴⁰⁵At any rate, it was there, and I was keenly on the lookout for any chance to pass the forbidden door.

⁴⁰⁶“It was only yesterday that the chance came. ⁴⁰⁷I 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. ⁴⁰⁸Recently he has been drinking hard, and yesterday evening he was very drunk; and when I came upstairs there was the key in the door. ⁴⁰⁹I have no doubt at all that he had left it there. ⁴¹⁰Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle were both downstairs, and the child was with them, so that I had an admirable opportunity. ⁴¹¹I turned the key gently in the lock, opened the door, and slipped through.

⁴¹²“There was a little passage in front of me, unpapered and uncarpeted, which turned at a right angle at the farther end. ⁴¹³Round this corner were three doors in a line, the first and third of which were open. ⁴¹⁴They 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. ⁴¹⁵The 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. ⁴¹⁶The door itself was locked as well, and the key was not there. ⁴¹⁷This 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. ⁴¹⁸Evidently there was a skylight which let in light from above. ⁴¹⁹As 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. ⁴²⁰A mad, unreasoning terror rose up in me at the sight, Mr. Holmes. ⁴²¹My 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. ⁴²²I rushed down the passage, through the door, and straight into the arms of Mr. Rucastle, who was waiting outside.

⁴²³“‘So,’ said he, smiling, ‘it was you, then. ⁴²⁴I thought that it must be when I saw the door open.’

⁴²⁵“‘Oh, I am so frightened!’ I panted.

⁴²⁶“‘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?’

⁴²⁷“‘But his voice was just a little too coaxing. ⁴²⁸He overdid it. ⁴²⁹I was keenly on my guard against him.

⁴³⁰“‘I was foolish enough to go into the empty wing,’ I answered. ⁴³¹‘But it is so lonely and eerie in this dim light that I was frightened and ran out again. ⁴³²Oh, it is so dreadfully still in there!’

⁴³³“‘Only that?’ said he, looking at me keenly.

⁴³⁴“‘Why, what did you think?’ I asked.

⁴³⁵“‘Why do you think that I lock this door?’

⁴³⁶“‘I am sure that I do not know.’

⁴³⁷“‘It is to keep people out who have no business there. ⁴³⁸Do you see?’ ⁴³⁹He was still smiling in the most amiable manner.

⁴⁴⁰“‘I am sure if I had known—’

⁴⁴¹“‘Well, then, you know now. ⁴⁴²And 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.’

⁴⁴³“‘I was so terrified that I do not know what I did. ⁴⁴⁴I suppose that I must have rushed past him into my room. ⁴⁴⁵I remember nothing until I found myself lying on my bed trembling all over. ⁴⁴⁶Then I thought of you, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁴⁷I could not live there longer without some advice. ⁴⁴⁸I was frightened of the house, of the man, of the woman, of the servants, even of the child. ⁴⁴⁹They were all horrible to me. ⁴⁵⁰If I could only bring you down all would be well. ⁴⁵¹Of course I might have fled from the house, but my curiosity was almost as strong as my fears. ⁴⁵²My mind was soon made up. ⁴⁵³I would send you a wire. ⁴⁵⁴I 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. ⁴⁵⁵A 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. ⁴⁵⁶I slipped in in safety and lay awake half the night in my joy at the thought of seeing you. ⁴⁵⁷I 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. ⁴⁵⁸Now 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.”

⁴⁵⁹Holmes and I had listened spellbound to this extraordinary story. ⁴⁶⁰My 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.

⁴⁶¹“‘Is Toller still drunk?’ he asked.

⁴⁶²“‘Yes. ⁴⁶³I heard his wife tell Mrs. Rucastle that she could do nothing with him.”

⁴⁶⁴“‘That is well. ⁴⁶⁵And the Rucastles go out to-night?’

⁴⁶⁶“Yes.”

⁴⁶⁷“Is there a cellar with a good strong lock?”

⁴⁶⁸“Yes, the wine-cellar.”

⁴⁶⁹“You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a very brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter.

⁴⁷⁰Do you think that you could perform one more feat? ⁴⁷¹I should not ask it of you if I did not think you a quite exceptional woman.”

⁴⁷²“I will try. ⁴⁷³What is it?”

⁴⁷⁴“We shall be at the Copper Beeches by seven o'clock, my friend and I. ⁴⁷⁵The Rucastles will be gone by that time, and Toller will, we hope, be incapable. ⁴⁷⁶There only remains Mrs. Toller, who might give the alarm. ⁴⁷⁷If you could send her into the cellar on some errand, and then turn the key upon her, you would facilitate matters immensely.”

⁴⁷⁸“I will do it.”

⁴⁷⁹“Excellent! ⁴⁸⁰We shall then look thoroughly into the affair. ⁴⁸¹Of course there is only one feasible explanation. ⁴⁸²You have been brought there to personate someone, and the real person is imprisoned in this chamber. ⁴⁸³That is obvious. ⁴⁸⁴As 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. ⁴⁸⁵You were chosen, doubtless, as resembling her in height, figure, and the colour of your hair. ⁴⁸⁶Hers had been cut off, very possibly in some illness through which she has passed, and so, of course, yours had to be sacrificed also. ⁴⁸⁷By a curious chance you came upon her tresses. ⁴⁸⁸The 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. ⁴⁸⁹The dog is let loose at night to prevent him from endeavouring to communicate with her. ⁴⁹⁰So much is fairly clear. ⁴⁹¹The most serious point in the case is the disposition of the child.”

⁴⁹²“What on earth has that to do with it?” I ejaculated.

⁴⁹³“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. ⁴⁹⁴Don't you see that the converse is equally valid. ⁴⁹⁵I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children. ⁴⁹⁶This 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.”

⁴⁹⁷“I am sure that you are right, Mr. Holmes,” cried our client. ⁴⁹⁸“A thousand things come back to me which make me certain that you have hit it. ⁴⁹⁹Oh, let us lose not an instant in bringing help to this poor creature.”

⁵⁰⁰“We must be circumspect, for we are dealing with a very cunning man. ⁵⁰¹We can do nothing until seven o'clock. ⁵⁰²At that hour we shall be with you, and it will not be long before we solve the mystery.”

⁵⁰³We 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. ⁵⁰⁴The 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.

⁵⁰⁵“Have you managed it?” asked Holmes.

⁵⁰⁶A loud thudding noise came from somewhere downstairs. ⁵⁰⁷“That is Mrs. Toller in the cellar,” said she. ⁵⁰⁸“Her husband lies snoring on the kitchen rug. ⁵⁰⁹Here are his keys, which are the duplicates of Mr. Rucastle's.”

⁵¹⁰“You have done well indeed!” cried Holmes with enthusiasm. ⁵¹¹“Now lead the way, and we shall soon see the end of this black business.”

⁵¹²We 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. ⁵¹³Holmes cut the cord and removed the transverse bar. ⁵¹⁴Then he tried the various keys in the lock, but without success. ⁵¹⁵No sound came from within, and at the silence Holmes' face clouded over.

⁵¹⁶“I trust that we are not too late,” said he. ⁵¹⁷“I think, Miss Hunter, that we had better go in without you. ⁵¹⁸Now, Watson, put your shoulder to it, and we shall see whether we cannot make our way in.”

⁵¹⁹It was an old rickety door and gave at once before our united strength. ⁵²⁰Together we rushed into the room. ⁵²¹It was empty. ⁵²²There was no furniture save a little pallet bed, a small table, and a basketful of linen. ⁵²³The skylight above was open, and the prisoner gone.

⁵²⁴“There has been some villainy here,” said Holmes; “this beauty has guessed Miss Hunter's intentions and has carried his victim off.”

⁵²⁵“But how?”

⁵²⁶“Through the skylight. ⁵²⁷We shall soon see how he managed it.” ⁵²⁸He swung himself up onto the roof. ⁵²⁹“Ah, yes,” he cried, “here's the end of a long light ladder against the eaves. ⁵³⁰That is how he did it.”

⁵³¹“But it is impossible,” said Miss Hunter; “the ladder was not there when the Rucastles went away.”

⁵³²“He has come back and done it. ⁵³³I tell you that he is a clever and dangerous man. ⁵³⁴I should not be very much surprised if this were he whose step I hear now upon the stair. ⁵³⁵I think, Watson, that it would be as well for you to have your pistol ready.”

⁵³⁶The 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. ⁵³⁷Miss Hunter screamed and shrunk against the wall at the sight of him, but Sherlock Holmes sprang forward and confronted him.

⁵³⁸“You villain!” said he, “where's your daughter?”

⁵³⁹The fat man cast his eyes round, and then up at the open skylight.

⁵⁴⁰“It is for me to ask you that,” he shrieked, “you thieves! ⁵⁴¹Spies and thieves! ⁵⁴²I have caught you, have I? ⁵⁴³You are in my power. ⁵⁴⁴I'll serve you!” ⁵⁴⁵He turned and clattered down the stairs as hard as he could go.

⁵⁴⁶“He's gone for the dog!” cried Miss Hunter.

⁵⁴⁷“I have my revolver,” said I.

⁵⁴⁸“Better close the front door,” cried Holmes, and we all rushed down the stairs together. ⁵⁴⁹We 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. ⁵⁵⁰An elderly man with a red face and shaking limbs came staggering out at a side door.

⁵⁵¹“My God!” he cried. ⁵⁵²“Someone has loosed the dog. ⁵⁵³It's not been fed for two days. ⁵⁵⁴Quick, quick, or it'll be too late!”

⁵⁵⁵Holmes and I rushed out and round the angle of the house, with Toller hurrying behind us. ⁵⁵⁶There was the huge famished brute, its black muzzle buried in Rucastle's throat, while he writhed and screamed upon the ground. ⁵⁵⁷Running up, I blew its brains out, and it fell over with its keen white teeth still meeting in the great creases of his neck. ⁵⁵⁸With much labour we separated them and carried him, living but horribly mangled, into the house. ⁵⁵⁹We 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. ⁵⁶⁰We were all assembled round him when the door opened, and a tall, gaunt woman entered the room.

⁵⁶¹"Mrs. Toller!" cried Miss Hunter.

⁵⁶²"Yes, miss. ⁵⁶³Mr. Rucastle let me out when he came back before he went up to you. ⁵⁶⁴Ah, 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."

⁵⁶⁵"Ha!" said Holmes, looking keenly at her. ⁵⁶⁶"It is clear that Mrs. Toller knows more about this matter than anyone else."

⁵⁶⁷"Yes, sir, I do, and I am ready enough to tell what I know."

⁵⁶⁸"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."

⁵⁶⁹"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. ⁵⁷⁰If 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."

⁵⁷¹"She was never happy at home, Miss Alice wasn't, from the time that her father married again. ⁵⁷²She 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. ⁵⁷³As 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. ⁵⁷⁴He 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. ⁵⁷⁵He wanted her to sign a paper, so that whether she married or not, he could use her money. ⁵⁷⁶When she wouldn't do it, he kept on worrying her until she got brain-fever, and for six weeks was at death's door. ⁵⁷⁷Then 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."

⁵⁷⁸"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. ⁵⁷⁹Mr. Rucastle then, I presume, took to this system of imprisonment?"

⁵⁸⁰"Yes, sir."

⁵⁸¹"And brought Miss Hunter down from London in order to get rid of the disagreeable persistence of Mr. Fowler."

⁵⁸²"That was it, sir."

⁵⁸³"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."

⁵⁸⁴"Mr. Fowler was a very kind-spoken, free-handed gentleman," said Mrs. Toller serenely.

⁵⁸⁵"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."

⁵⁸⁶“You have it, sir, just as it happened.”

⁵⁸⁷“I am sure we owe you an apology, Mrs. Toller,” said Holmes, “for you have certainly cleared up everything which puzzled us. ⁵⁸⁸And 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.”

⁵⁸⁹And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the copper beeches in front of the door. ⁵⁹⁰Mr. Rucastle survived, but was always a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of his devoted wife. ⁵⁹¹They 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. ⁵⁹²As 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.

The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Silver Blaze

¹“I am afraid, Watson, that I shall have to go,” said Holmes, as we sat down together to our breakfast one morning.

²“Go! ³Where to?”

⁴“To Dartmoor; to King's Pyland.”

⁵I was not surprised. ⁶Indeed, my only wonder was that he had not already been mixed up in this extraordinary case, which was the one topic of conversation through the length and breadth of England. ⁷For a whole day my companion had rambled about the room with his chin upon his chest and his brows knitted, charging and recharging his pipe with the strongest black tobacco, and absolutely deaf to any of my questions or remarks. ⁸Fresh editions of every paper had been sent up by our news agent, only to be glanced over and tossed down into a corner. ⁹Yet, silent as he was, I knew perfectly well what it was over which he was brooding. ¹⁰There was but one problem before the public which could challenge his powers of analysis, and that was the singular disappearance of the favorite for the Wessex Cup, and the tragic murder of its trainer. ¹¹When, therefore, he suddenly announced his intention of setting out for the scene of the drama it was only what I had both expected and hoped for.

¹²“I should be most happy to go down with you if I should not be in the way,” said I.

¹³“My dear Watson, you would confer a great favour upon me by coming. ¹⁴And I think that your time will not be misspent, for there are points about the case which promise to make it an absolutely unique one. ¹⁵We have, I think, just time to catch our train at Paddington, and I will go further into the matter upon our journey. ¹⁶You would oblige me by bringing with you your very excellent field-glass.”

¹⁷And so it happened that an hour or so later I found myself in the corner of a first-class carriage flying along en route for Exeter, while Sherlock Holmes, with his sharp, eager face framed in his ear-flapped travelling-cap, dipped rapidly into the bundle of fresh papers which he had procured at Paddington. ¹⁸We had left Reading far behind us before he thrust the last one of them under the seat, and offered me his cigar-case.

¹⁹“We are going well,” said he, looking out the window and glancing at his watch. ²⁰“Our rate at present is fifty-three and a half miles an hour.”

²¹“I have not observed the quarter-mile posts,” said I.

²²“Nor have I. ²³But the telegraph posts upon this line are sixty yards apart, and the calculation is a simple one. ²⁴I presume that you have looked into this matter of the murder of John Straker and the disappearance of Silver Blaze?”

²⁵“I have seen what the Telegraph and the Chronicle have to say.”

²⁶“It is one of those cases where the art of the reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for the acquiring of fresh evidence. ²⁷The tragedy has been so uncommon, so complete and of such personal importance to so many people, that we are suffering from a plethora of surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis. ²⁸The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact—of absolute undeniable fact—from the embellishments of theorists and reporters. ²⁹Then, having established ourselves upon this sound basis, it is our duty to see what inferences may be drawn and what are the special points upon which the whole mystery turns. ³⁰On Tuesday evening I received telegrams from both Colonel Ross, the owner of the horse, and from Inspector Gregory, who is looking after the case, inviting my cooperation.

³¹“Tuesday evening!” I exclaimed. ³²“And this is Thursday morning. ³³Why didn't you go down yesterday?”

³⁴“Because I made a blunder, my dear Watson—which is, I am afraid, a more common occurrence than any one would think who only knew me through your memoirs. ³⁵The fact is that I could not believe it possible that the most remarkable horse in England could long remain concealed, especially in so sparsely inhabited a place as the north of Dartmoor. ³⁶From hour to hour yesterday I expected to hear that he had been found, and that his abductor was the murderer of John Straker. ³⁷When, however, another morning had come, and I found that beyond the arrest of young Fitzroy Simpson nothing had been done, I felt that it was time for me to take action. ³⁸Yet in some ways I feel that yesterday has not been wasted.”

³⁹“You have formed a theory, then?”

⁴⁰“At least I have got a grip of the essential facts of the case. ⁴¹I shall enumerate them to you, for nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person, and I can hardly expect your co-operation if I do not show you the position from which we start.”

⁴²I lay back against the cushions, puffing at my cigar, while Holmes, leaning forward, with his long, thin forefinger checking off the points upon the palm of his left hand, gave me a sketch of the events which had led to our journey.

⁴³“Silver Blaze,” said he, “is from the Somomy stock, and holds as brilliant a record as his famous ancestor. ⁴⁴He is now in his fifth year, and has brought in turn each of the prizes of the turf to Colonel Ross, his fortunate owner. ⁴⁵Up to the time of the catastrophe he was the first favorite for the Wessex Cup, the betting being three to one on him. ⁴⁶He has always, however, been a prime favorite with the racing public, and has never yet disappointed them, so that even at those odds enormous sums of money have been laid upon him. ⁴⁷It is obvious, therefore, that there were many people who had the strongest interest in preventing Silver Blaze from being there at the fall of the flag next Tuesday.

⁴⁸“The fact was, of course, appreciated at King's Pyland, where the Colonel's training-stable is situated. ⁴⁹Every precaution was taken to guard the favorite. ⁵⁰The trainer, John Straker, is a retired jockey who rode in Colonel Ross's colors before he became too heavy for the weighing-chair. ⁵¹He has served the Colonel for five years as jockey and for seven as trainer, and has always shown himself to be a zealous and honest servant. ⁵²Under him were three lads; for the establishment was a small one, containing only four horses in all. ⁵³One of these lads sat up each night in the stable, while the others slept in the loft. ⁵⁴All three bore excellent characters. ⁵⁵John Straker, who is a married man, lived in a small villa about two hundred yards from the stables. ⁵⁶He has no children, keeps one maid-servant, and is comfortably off. ⁵⁷The country round is very lonely, but about half a mile to the north there is a small cluster of villas which have been built by a Tavistock contractor for the use of invalids and others who may wish to enjoy the pure Dartmoor air. ⁵⁸Tavistock itself lies two miles to the west, while across the moor, also about two miles distant, is the larger training establishment of Mapleton, which belongs to Lord Backwater, and is managed by Silas Brown. ⁵⁹In every other direction the moor is a complete wilderness, inhabited only by a few roaming gypsies. ⁶⁰Such was the general situation last Monday night when the catastrophe occurred.

⁶¹“On that evening the horses had been exercised and watered as usual, and the stables were locked up at nine o'clock. ⁶²Two of the lads walked up to the trainer's house, where they had supper in the kitchen, while the third, Ned Hunter, remained on guard. ⁶³At a few minutes after nine the maid, Edith Baxter, carried down to the stables his supper, which consisted of a dish of curried mutton. ⁶⁴She took no liquid, as there was a water-tap in the stables, and it was the rule that the lad on duty should drink nothing else. ⁶⁵The maid carried a lantern with her, as it was very dark and the path ran across the open moor.

⁶⁶“Edith Baxter was within thirty yards of the stables, when a man appeared out of the darkness and called to her to stop. ⁶⁷As he stepped into the circle of yellow light thrown by the lantern she saw that he was a person of gentlemanly bearing, dressed in a gray suit of tweeds, with a cloth cap. ⁶⁸He wore gaiters, and carried a heavy stick with a knob to it. ⁶⁹She was most impressed, however, by the extreme pallor of his face and by the nervousness of his manner. ⁷⁰His age, she thought, would be rather over thirty than under it.

⁷¹“Can you tell me where I am?” he asked. ⁷²“I had almost made up my mind to sleep on the moor, when I saw the light of your lantern.”

⁷³“You are close to the King's Pyland training-stables,” said she.

⁷⁴“Oh, indeed! ⁷⁵What a stroke of luck!” he cried. ⁷⁶“I understand that a stable-boy sleeps there alone every night. ⁷⁷Perhaps that is his supper which you are carrying to him. ⁷⁸Now I am sure that you would not be too proud to earn the price of a new dress, would you?” ⁷⁹He took a piece of white paper folded up out of his waistcoat pocket. ⁸⁰“See that the boy has this to-night, and you shall have the prettiest frock that money can buy.”

⁸¹“She was frightened by the earnestness of his manner, and ran past him to the window through which she was accustomed to hand the meals. ⁸²It was already opened, and Hunter was seated at the small table inside. ⁸³She had begun to tell him of what had happened, when the stranger came up again.

⁸⁴“Good-evening,” said he, looking through the window. ⁸⁵“I wanted to have a word with you.” ⁸⁶The girl has sworn that as he spoke she noticed the corner of the little paper packet protruding from his closed hand.

⁸⁷“What business have you here?” asked the lad.

⁸⁸“It's business that may put something into your pocket,” said the other. ⁸⁹“You've two horses in for the Wessex Cup—Silver Blaze and Bayard. ⁹⁰Let me have the straight tip and you won't be a loser. ⁹¹Is it a fact that at the weights Bayard could give the other a hundred yards in five furlongs, and that the stable have put their money on him?”

⁹²“So, you're one of those damned touts!” cried the lad. ⁹³“I'll show you how we serve them in King's Pyland.” ⁹⁴He sprang up and rushed across the stable to unloose the dog. ⁹⁵The girl fled away to the house, but as she ran she looked back and saw that the stranger was leaning through the window. ⁹⁶A minute later, however, when Hunter rushed out with the hound he was gone, and though he ran all round the buildings he failed to find any trace of him.”

⁹⁷“One moment,” I asked. ⁹⁸“Did the stable-boy, when he ran out with the dog, leave the door unlocked behind him?”

⁹⁹“Excellent, Watson, excellent!” murmured my companion. ¹⁰⁰“The importance of the point struck me so forcibly that I sent a special wire to Dartmoor yesterday to clear the matter up. ¹⁰¹The boy locked the door before he left it. ¹⁰²The window, I may add, was not large enough for a man to get through.

¹⁰³“Hunter waited until his fellow-grooms had returned, when he sent a message to the trainer and told him what had occurred. ¹⁰⁴Straker was excited at hearing the account, although he does not seem to have quite realized its true significance. ¹⁰⁵It left him, however, vaguely uneasy, and Mrs. Straker, waking at one in the morning, found that he was dressing. ¹⁰⁶In reply to her inquiries, he said that he could not sleep on account of his anxiety about the horses, and that he intended to walk down to the stables to see that all was well. ¹⁰⁷She begged him to remain at home, as she could hear the rain pattering against the window, but in spite of her entreaties he pulled on his large mackintosh and left the house.

¹⁰⁸“Mrs. Straker awoke at seven in the morning, to find that her husband had not yet returned. ¹⁰⁹She dressed herself hastily, called the maid, and set off for the stables. ¹¹⁰The door was open; inside, huddled

together upon a chair, Hunter was sunk in a state of absolute stupor, the favorite's stall was empty, and there were no signs of his trainer.

¹¹¹“The two lads who slept in the chaff-cutting loft above the harness-room were quickly aroused. ¹¹²They had heard nothing during the night, for they are both sound sleepers. ¹¹³Hunter was obviously under the influence of some powerful drug, and as no sense could be got out of him, he was left to sleep it off while the two lads and the two women ran out in search of the absentees. ¹¹⁴They still had hopes that the trainer had for some reason taken out the horse for early exercise, but on ascending the knoll near the house, from which all the neighboring moors were visible, they not only could see no signs of the missing favorite, but they perceived something which warned them that they were in the presence of a tragedy.

¹¹⁵“About a quarter of a mile from the stables John Straker's overcoat was flapping from a furze-bush. ¹¹⁶Immediately beyond there was a bowl-shaped depression in the moor, and at the bottom of this was found the dead body of the unfortunate trainer. ¹¹⁷His head had been shattered by a savage blow from some heavy weapon, and he was wounded on the thigh, where there was a long, clean cut, inflicted evidently by some very sharp instrument. ¹¹⁸It was clear, however, that Straker had defended himself vigorously against his assailants, for in his right hand he held a small knife, which was clotted with blood up to the handle, while in his left he clasped a red and black silk cravat, which was recognized by the maid as having been worn on the preceding evening by the stranger who had visited the stables. ¹¹⁹Hunter, on recovering from his stupor, was also quite positive as to the ownership of the cravat. ¹²⁰He was equally certain that the same stranger had, while standing at the window, drugged his curried mutton, and so deprived the stables of their watchman. ¹²¹As to the missing horse, there were abundant proofs in the mud which lay at the bottom of the fatal hollow that he had been there at the time of the struggle. ¹²²But from that morning he has disappeared, and although a large reward has been offered, and all the gypsies of Dartmoor are on the alert, no news has come of him. ¹²³Finally, an analysis has shown that the remains of his supper left by the stable-lad contain an appreciable quantity of powdered opium, while the people at the house partook of the same dish on the same night without any ill effect.

¹²⁴“Those are the main facts of the case, stripped of all surmise, and stated as baldly as possible. ¹²⁵I shall now recapitulate what the police have done in the matter.

¹²⁶“Inspector Gregory, to whom the case has been committed, is an extremely competent officer. ¹²⁷Were he but gifted with imagination he might rise to great heights in his profession. ¹²⁸On his arrival he promptly found and arrested the man upon whom suspicion naturally rested. ¹²⁹There was little difficulty in finding him, for he inhabited one of those villas which I have mentioned. ¹³⁰His name, it appears, was Fitzroy Simpson. ¹³¹He was a man of excellent birth and education, who had squandered a fortune upon the turf, and who lived now by doing a little quiet and genteel book-making in the sporting clubs of London. ¹³²An examination of his betting-book shows that bets to the amount of five thousand pounds had been registered by him against the favorite. ¹³³On being arrested he volunteered the statement that he had come down to Dartmoor in the hope of getting some information about the King's Pyland horses, and also about Desborough, the second favorite, which was in charge of Silas Brown at the Mapleton stables. ¹³⁴He did not attempt to deny that he had acted as described upon the evening before, but declared that he had no sinister designs, and had simply wished to obtain first-hand information. ¹³⁵When confronted with his cravat, he turned very pale, and was utterly unable to account for its presence in the hand of the murdered man. ¹³⁶His wet clothing showed that he had been out in the storm of the night before, and his stick, which was a Penang-lawyer weighted with lead, was just such a weapon as might, by repeated blows, have inflicted the terrible injuries to which the trainer had succumbed. ¹³⁷On the other hand, there was no wound upon his person, while the state of Straker's knife would show that one at least of his assailants must bear his mark upon him. ¹³⁸There you have it all in a nutshell, Watson, and if you can give me any light I shall be infinitely obliged to you.”

¹³⁹I had listened with the greatest interest to the statement which Holmes, with characteristic clearness, had laid before me. ¹⁴⁰Though most of the facts were familiar to me, I had not sufficiently appreciated their relative importance, nor their connection to each other.

¹⁴¹"Is in not possible," I suggested, "that the incised wound upon Straker may have been caused by his own knife in the convulsive struggles which follow any brain injury?"

¹⁴²"It is more than possible; it is probable," said Holmes. ¹⁴³"In that case one of the main points in favor of the accused disappears."

¹⁴⁴"And yet," said I, "even now I fail to understand what the theory of the police can be."

¹⁴⁵"I am afraid that whatever theory we state has very grave objections to it," returned my companion.

¹⁴⁶"The police imagine, I take it, that this Fitzroy Simpson, having drugged the lad, and having in some way obtained a duplicate key, opened the stable door and took out the horse, with the intention, apparently, of kidnapping him altogether. ¹⁴⁷His bridle is missing, so that Simpson must have put this on. ¹⁴⁸Then, having left the door open behind him, he was leading the horse away over the moor, when he was either met or overtaken by the trainer. ¹⁴⁹A row naturally ensued. ¹⁵⁰Simpson beat out the trainer's brains with his heavy stick without receiving any injury from the small knife which Straker used in self-defence, and then the thief either led the horse on to some secret hiding-place, or else it may have bolted during the struggle, and be now wandering out on the moors. ¹⁵¹That is the case as it appears to the police, and improbable as it is, all other explanations are more improbable still. ¹⁵²However, I shall very quickly test the matter when I am once upon the spot, and until then I cannot really see how we can get much further than our present position."

¹⁵³It was evening before we reached the little town of Tavistock, which lies, like the boss of a shield, in the middle of the huge circle of Dartmoor. ¹⁵⁴Two gentlemen were awaiting us in the station—the one a tall, fair man with lion-like hair and beard and curiously penetrating light blue eyes; the other a small, alert person, very neat and dapper, in a frock-coat and gaiters, with trim little side-whiskers and an eye-glass. ¹⁵⁵The latter was Colonel Ross, the well-known sportsman; the other, Inspector Gregory, a man who was rapidly making his name in the English detective service.

¹⁵⁶"I am delighted that you have come down, Mr. Holmes," said the Colonel. ¹⁵⁷"The Inspector here has done all that could possibly be suggested, but I wish to leave no stone unturned in trying to avenge poor Straker and in recovering my horse."

¹⁵⁸"Have there been any fresh developments?" asked Holmes.

¹⁵⁹"I am sorry to say that we have made very little progress," said the Inspector. ¹⁶⁰"We have an open carriage outside, and as you would no doubt like to see the place before the light fails, we might talk it over as we drive."

¹⁶¹A minute later we were all seated in a comfortable landau, and were rattling through the quaint old Devonshire city. ¹⁶²Inspector Gregory was full of his case, and poured out a stream of remarks, while Holmes threw in an occasional question or interjection. ¹⁶³Colonel Ross leaned back with his arms folded and his hat tilted over his eyes, while I listened with interest to the dialogue of the two detectives.

¹⁶⁴Gregory was formulating his theory, which was almost exactly what Holmes had foretold in the train.

¹⁶⁵"The net is drawn pretty close round Fitzroy Simpson," he remarked, "and I believe myself that he is our man. ¹⁶⁶At the same time I recognize that the evidence is purely circumstantial, and that some new development may upset it."

¹⁶⁷"How about Straker's knife?"

¹⁶⁸"We have quite come to the conclusion that he wounded himself in his fall."

¹⁶⁹“My friend Dr. Watson made that suggestion to me as we came down. ¹⁷⁰If so, it would tell against this man Simpson.”

¹⁷¹“Undoubtedly. ¹⁷²He has neither a knife nor any sign of a wound. ¹⁷³The evidence against him is certainly very strong. ¹⁷⁴He had a great interest in the disappearance of the favorite. ¹⁷⁵He lies under suspicion of having poisoned the stable-boy, he was undoubtedly out in the storm, he was armed with a heavy stick, and his cravat was found in the dead man's hand. ¹⁷⁶I really think we have enough to go before a jury.”

¹⁷⁷Holmes shook his head. ¹⁷⁸“A clever counsel would tear it all to rags,” said he. ¹⁷⁹“Why should he take the horse out of the stable? ¹⁸⁰If he wished to injure it why could he not do it there? ¹⁸¹Has a duplicate key been found in his possession? ¹⁸²What chemist sold him the powdered opium? ¹⁸³Above all, where could he, a stranger to the district, hide a horse, and such a horse as this? ¹⁸⁴What is his own explanation as to the paper which he wished the maid to give to the stable-boy?”

¹⁸⁵“He says that it was a ten-pound note. ¹⁸⁶One was found in his purse. ¹⁸⁷But your other difficulties are not so formidable as they seem. ¹⁸⁸He is not a stranger to the district. ¹⁸⁹He has twice lodged at Tavistock in the summer. ¹⁹⁰The opium was probably brought from London. ¹⁹¹The key, having served its purpose, would be hurled away. ¹⁹²The horse may be at the bottom of one of the pits or old mines upon the moor.”

¹⁹³“What does he say about the cravat?”

¹⁹⁴“He acknowledges that it is his, and declares that he had lost it. ¹⁹⁵But a new element has been introduced into the case which may account for his leading the horse from the stable.”

¹⁹⁶Holmes pricked up his ears.

¹⁹⁷“We have found traces which show that a party of gypsies encamped on Monday night within a mile of the spot where the murder took place. ¹⁹⁸On Tuesday they were gone. ¹⁹⁹Now, presuming that there was some understanding between Simpson and these gypsies, might he not have been leading the horse to them when he was overtaken, and may they not have him now?”

²⁰⁰“It is certainly possible.”

²⁰¹“The moor is being scoured for these gypsies. ²⁰²I have also examined every stable and out-house in Tavistock, and for a radius of ten miles.”

²⁰³“There is another training-stable quite close, I understand?”

²⁰⁴“Yes, and that is a factor which we must certainly not neglect. ²⁰⁵As Desborough, their horse, was second in the betting, they had an interest in the disappearance of the favorite. ²⁰⁶Silas Brown, the trainer, is known to have had large bets upon the event, and he was no friend to poor Straker. ²⁰⁷We have, however, examined the stables, and there is nothing to connect him with the affair.”

²⁰⁸“And nothing to connect this man Simpson with the interests of the Mapleton stables?”

²⁰⁹“Nothing at all.”

²¹⁰Holmes leaned back in the carriage, and the conversation ceased. ²¹¹A few minutes later our driver pulled up at a neat little red-brick villa with overhanging eaves which stood by the road. ²¹²Some distance off, across a paddock, lay a long gray-tiled out-building. ²¹³In every other direction the low curves of the moor, bronze-colored from the fading ferns, stretched away to the sky-line, broken only by the steeples of Tavistock, and by a cluster of houses away to the westward which marked the Mapleton stables. ²¹⁴We all sprang out with the exception of Holmes, who continued to lean back with

his eyes fixed upon the sky in front of him, entirely absorbed in his own thoughts. ²¹⁵It was only when I touched his arm that he roused himself with a violent start and stepped out of the carriage.

²¹⁶“Excuse me,” said he, turning to Colonel Ross, who had looked at him in some surprise. ²¹⁷“I was day-dreaming.” ²¹⁸There was a gleam in his eyes and a suppressed excitement in his manner which convinced me, used as I was to his ways, that his hand was upon a clue, though I could not imagine where he had found it.

²¹⁹“Perhaps you would prefer at once to go on to the scene of the crime, Mr. Holmes?” said Gregory.

²²⁰“I think that I should prefer to stay here a little and go into one or two questions of detail. ²²¹Straker was brought back here, I presume?”

²²²“Yes; he lies upstairs. ²²³The inquest is to-morrow.”

²²⁴“He has been in your service some years, Colonel Ross?”

²²⁵“I have always found him an excellent servant.”

²²⁶“I presume that you made an inventory of what he had in his pockets at the time of his death, Inspector?”

²²⁷“I have the things themselves in the sitting-room, if you would care to see them.”

²²⁸“I should be very glad.” ²²⁹We all filed into the front room and sat round the central table while the Inspector unlocked a square tin box and laid a small heap of things before us. ²³⁰There was a box of vestas, two inches of tallow candle, an A D P brier-root pipe, a pouch of seal-skin with half an ounce of long-cut Cavendish, a silver watch with a gold chain, five sovereigns in gold, an aluminum pencil-case, a few papers, and an ivory-handled knife with a very delicate, inflexible blade marked Weiss & Co., London.

²³¹“This is a very singular knife,” said Holmes, lifting it up and examining it minutely. ²³²“I presume, as I see blood-stains upon it, that it is the one which was found in the dead man's grasp. ²³³Watson, this knife is surely in your line?”

²³⁴“It is what we call a cataract knife,” said I.

²³⁵“I thought so. ²³⁶A very delicate blade devised for very delicate work. ²³⁷A strange thing for a man to carry with him upon a rough expedition, especially as it would not shut in his pocket.”

²³⁸“The tip was guarded by a disk of cork which we found beside his body,” said the Inspector. ²³⁹“His wife tells us that the knife had lain upon the dressing-table, and that he had picked it up as he left the room. ²⁴⁰It was a poor weapon, but perhaps the best that he could lay his hands on at the moment.”

²⁴¹“Very possible. ²⁴²How about these papers?”

²⁴³“Three of them are receipted hay-dealers' accounts. ²⁴⁴One of them is a letter of instructions from Colonel Ross. ²⁴⁵This other is a milliner's account for thirty-seven pounds fifteen made out by Madame Lesurier, of Bond Street, to William Derbyshire. ²⁴⁶Mrs. Straker tells us that Derbyshire was a friend of her husband's and that occasionally his letters were addressed here.”

²⁴⁷“Madam Derbyshire had somewhat expensive tastes,” remarked Holmes, glancing down the account.

²⁴⁸“Twenty-two guineas is rather heavy for a single costume. ²⁴⁹However there appears to be nothing more to learn, and we may now go down to the scene of the crime.”

²⁵⁰As we emerged from the sitting-room a woman, who had been waiting in the passage, took a step forward and laid her hand upon the Inspector's sleeve. ²⁵¹Her face was haggard and thin and eager, stamped with the print of a recent horror.

²⁵²“Have you got them? ²⁵³Have you found them?” she panted.

²⁵⁴“No, Mrs. Straker. ²⁵⁵But Mr. Holmes here has come from London to help us, and we shall do all that is possible.”

²⁵⁶“Surely I met you in Plymouth at a garden-party some little time ago, Mrs. Straker?” said Holmes.

²⁵⁷“No, sir; you are mistaken.”

²⁵⁸“Dear me! ²⁵⁹Why, I could have sworn to it. ²⁶⁰You wore a costume of dove-colored silk with ostrich-feather trimming.”

²⁶¹“I never had such a dress, sir,” answered the lady.

²⁶²“Ah, that quite settles it,” said Holmes. ²⁶³And with an apology he followed the Inspector outside.

²⁶⁴A short walk across the moor took us to the hollow in which the body had been found. ²⁶⁵At the brink of it was the furze-bush upon which the coat had been hung.

²⁶⁶“There was no wind that night, I understand,” said Holmes.

²⁶⁷“None; but very heavy rain.”

²⁶⁸“In that case the overcoat was not blown against the furze-bush, but placed there.”

²⁶⁹“Yes, it was laid across the bush.”

²⁷⁰“You fill me with interest, I perceive that the ground has been trampled up a good deal. ²⁷¹No doubt many feet have been here since Monday night.”

²⁷²“A piece of matting has been laid here at the side, and we have all stood upon that.”

²⁷³“Excellent.”

²⁷⁴“In this bag I have one of the boots which Straker wore, one of Fitzroy Simpson's shoes, and a cast horseshoe of Silver Blaze.”

²⁷⁵“My dear Inspector, you surpass yourself!” ²⁷⁶Holmes took the bag, and, descending into the hollow, he pushed the matting into a more central position. ²⁷⁷Then stretching himself upon his face and leaning his chin upon his hands, he made a careful study of the trampled mud in front of him. ²⁷⁸“Hullo!” said he, suddenly. ²⁷⁹“What's this?” ²⁸⁰It was a wax vesta half burned, which was so coated with mud that it looked at first like a little chip of wood.

²⁸¹“I cannot think how I came to overlook it,” said the Inspector, with an expression of annoyance.

²⁸²“It was invisible, buried in the mud. ²⁸³I only saw it because I was looking for it.”

²⁸⁴“What! ²⁸⁵You expected to find it?”

²⁸⁶“I thought it not unlikely.”

²⁸⁷He took the boots from the bag, and compared the impressions of each of them with marks upon the ground. ²⁸⁸Then he clambered up to the rim of the hollow, and crawled about among the ferns and bushes.

²⁸⁹“I am afraid that there are no more tracks,” said the Inspector. ²⁹⁰“I have examined the ground very carefully for a hundred yards in each direction.”

²⁹¹“Indeed!” said Holmes, rising. ²⁹²“I should not have the impertinence to do it again after what you say. ²⁹³But I should like to take a little walk over the moor before it grows dark, that I may know my ground to-morrow, and I think that I shall put this horseshoe into my pocket for luck.”

²⁹⁴Colonel Ross, who had shown some signs of impatience at my companion's quiet and systematic method of work, glanced at his watch. ²⁹⁵"I wish you would come back with me, Inspector," said he. ²⁹⁶"There are several points on which I should like your advice, and especially as to whether we do not owe it to the public to remove our horse's name from the entries for the Cup."

²⁹⁷"Certainly not," cried Holmes, with decision. ²⁹⁸"I should let the name stand."

²⁹⁹The Colonel bowed. ³⁰⁰"I am very glad to have had your opinion, sir," said he. ³⁰¹"You will find us at poor Straker's house when you have finished your walk, and we can drive together into Tavistock."

³⁰²He turned back with the Inspector, while Holmes and I walked slowly across the moor. ³⁰³The sun was beginning to sink behind the stables of Mapleton, and the long, sloping plain in front of us was tinged with gold, deepening into rich, ruddy browns where the faded ferns and brambles caught the evening light. ³⁰⁴But the glories of the landscape were all wasted upon my companion, who was sunk in the deepest thought.

³⁰⁵"It's this way, Watson," said he at last. ³⁰⁶"We may leave the question of who killed John Straker for the instant, and confine ourselves to finding out what has become of the horse. ³⁰⁷Now, supposing that he broke away during or after the tragedy, where could he have gone to? ³⁰⁸The horse is a very gregarious creature. ³⁰⁹If left to himself his instincts would have been either to return to King's Pyland or go over to Mapleton. ³¹⁰Why should he run wild upon the moor? ³¹¹He would surely have been seen by now. ³¹²And why should gypsies kidnap him? ³¹³These people always clear out when they hear of trouble, for they do not wish to be pestered by the police. ³¹⁴They could not hope to sell such a horse. ³¹⁵They would run a great risk and gain nothing by taking him. ³¹⁶Surely that is clear."

³¹⁷"Where is he, then?"

³¹⁸"I have already said that he must have gone to King's Pyland or to Mapleton. ³¹⁹He is not at King's Pyland. ³²⁰Therefore he is at Mapleton. ³²¹Let us take that as a working hypothesis and see what it leads us to. ³²²This part of the moor, as the Inspector remarked, is very hard and dry. ³²³But it falls away towards Mapleton, and you can see from here that there is a long hollow over yonder, which must have been very wet on Monday night. ³²⁴If our supposition is correct, then the horse must have crossed that, and there is the point where we should look for his tracks."

³²⁵We had been walking briskly during this conversation, and a few more minutes brought us to the hollow in question. ³²⁶At Holmes' request I walked down the bank to the right, and he to the left, but I had not taken fifty paces before I heard him give a shout, and saw him waving his hand to me. ³²⁷The track of a horse was plainly outlined in the soft earth in front of him, and the shoe which he took from his pocket exactly fitted the impression.

³²⁸"See the value of imagination," said Holmes. ³²⁹"It is the one quality which Gregory lacks. ³³⁰We imagined what might have happened, acted upon the supposition, and find ourselves justified. ³³¹Let us proceed."

³³²We crossed the marshy bottom and passed over a quarter of a mile of dry, hard turf. ³³³Again the ground sloped, and again we came on the tracks. ³³⁴Then we lost them for half a mile, but only to pick them up once more quite close to Mapleton. ³³⁵It was Holmes who saw them first, and he stood pointing with a look of triumph upon his face. ³³⁶A man's track was visible beside the horse's.

³³⁷"The horse was alone before," I cried.

³³⁸"Quite so. ³³⁹It was alone before. ³⁴⁰Hullo, what is this?"

³⁴¹The double track turned sharp off and took the direction of King's Pyland. ³⁴²Holmes whistled, and we both followed along after it. ³⁴³His eyes were on the trail, but I happened to look a little to one side, and saw to my surprise the same tracks coming back again in the opposite direction.

³⁴⁴“One for you, Watson,” said Holmes, when I pointed it out. ³⁴⁵“You have saved us a long walk, which would have brought us back on our own traces. ³⁴⁶Let us follow the return track.”

³⁴⁷We had not to go far. ³⁴⁸It ended at the paving of asphalt which led up to the gates of the Mapleton stables. ³⁴⁹As we approached, a groom ran out from them.

³⁵⁰“We don't want any loiterers about here,” said he.

³⁵¹“I only wished to ask a question,” said Holmes, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. ³⁵²“Should I be too early to see your master, Mr. Silas Brown, if I were to call at five o'clock to-morrow morning?”

³⁵³“Bless you, sir, if any one is about he will be, for he is always the first stirring. ³⁵⁴But here he is, sir, to answer your questions for himself. ³⁵⁵No, sir, no; it is as much as my place is worth to let him see me touch your money. ³⁵⁶Afterwards, if you like.”

³⁵⁷As Sherlock Holmes replaced the half-crown which he had drawn from his pocket, a fierce-looking elderly man strode out from the gate with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand.

³⁵⁸“What's this, Dawson!” he cried. ³⁵⁹“No gossiping! ³⁶⁰Go about your business! ³⁶¹And you, what the devil do you want here?”

³⁶²“Ten minutes' talk with you, my good sir,” said Holmes in the sweetest of voices.

³⁶³“I've no time to talk to every gadabout. ³⁶⁴We want no stranger here. ³⁶⁵Be off, or you may find a dog at your heels.”

³⁶⁶Holmes leaned forward and whispered something in the trainer's ear. ³⁶⁷He started violently and flushed to the temples.

³⁶⁸“It's a lie!” he shouted, “an infernal lie!”

³⁶⁹“Very good. ³⁷⁰Shall we argue about it here in public or talk it over in your parlor?”

³⁷¹“Oh, come in if you wish to.”

³⁷²Holmes smiled. ³⁷³“I shall not keep you more than a few minutes, Watson,” said he. ³⁷⁴“Now, Mr. Brown, I am quite at your disposal.”

³⁷⁵It was twenty minutes, and the reds had all faded into grays before Holmes and the trainer reappeared.

³⁷⁶Never have I seen such a change as had been brought about in Silas Brown in that short time. ³⁷⁷His face was ashy pale, beads of perspiration shone upon his brow, and his hands shook until the hunting-crop wagged like a branch in the wind. ³⁷⁸His bullying, overbearing manner was all gone too, and he cringed along at my companion's side like a dog with its master.

³⁷⁹“Your instructions will be done. ³⁸⁰It shall all be done,” said he.

³⁸¹“There must be no mistake,” said Holmes, looking round at him. ³⁸²The other winced as he read the menace in his eyes.

³⁸³“Oh no, there shall be no mistake. ³⁸⁴It shall be there. ³⁸⁵Should I change it first or not?”

³⁸⁶Holmes thought a little and then burst out laughing. ³⁸⁷“No, don't,” said he; “I shall write to you about it. ³⁸⁸No tricks, now, or—”

³⁸⁹“Oh, you can trust me, you can trust me!”

³⁹⁰“Yes, I think I can. ³⁹¹Well, you shall hear from me to-morrow.” ³⁹²He turned upon his heel, disregarding the trembling hand which the other held out to him, and we set off for King's Pyland.

³⁹³“A more perfect compound of the bully, coward, and sneak than Master Silas Brown I have seldom met with,” remarked Holmes as we trudged along together.

³⁹⁴“He has the horse, then?”

³⁹⁵“He tried to bluster out of it, but I described to him so exactly what his actions had been upon that morning that he is convinced that I was watching him. ³⁹⁶Of course you observed the peculiarly square toes in the impressions, and that his own boots exactly corresponded to them. ³⁹⁷Again, of course no subordinate would have dared to do such a thing. ³⁹⁸I described to him how, when according to his custom he was the first down, he perceived a strange horse wandering over the moor. ³⁹⁹How he went out to it, and his astonishment at recognizing, from the white forehead which has given the favorite its name, that chance had put in his power the only horse which could beat the one upon which he had put his money. ⁴⁰⁰Then I described how his first impulse had been to lead him back to King's Pyland, and how the devil had shown him how he could hide the horse until the race was over, and how he had led it back and concealed it at Mapleton. ⁴⁰¹When I told him every detail he gave it up and thought only of saving his own skin.”

⁴⁰²“But his stables had been searched?”

⁴⁰³“Oh, and old horse-faker like him has many a dodge.”

⁴⁰⁴“But are you not afraid to leave the horse in his power now, since he has every interest in injuring it?”

⁴⁰⁵“My dear fellow, he will guard it as the apple of his eye. ⁴⁰⁶He knows that his only hope of mercy is to produce it safe.”

⁴⁰⁷“Colonel Ross did not impress me as a man who would be likely to show much mercy in any case.”

⁴⁰⁸“The matter does not rest with Colonel Ross. ⁴⁰⁹I follow my own methods, and tell as much or as little as I choose. ⁴¹⁰That is the advantage of being unofficial. ⁴¹¹I don't know whether you observed it, Watson, but the Colonel's manner has been just a trifle cavalier to me. ⁴¹²I am inclined now to have a little amusement at his expense. ⁴¹³Say nothing to him about the horse.”

⁴¹⁴“Certainly not without your permission.”

⁴¹⁵“And of course this is all quite a minor point compared to the question of who killed John Straker.”

⁴¹⁶“And you will devote yourself to that?”

⁴¹⁷“On the contrary, we both go back to London by the night train.”

⁴¹⁸I was thunderstruck by my friend's words. ⁴¹⁹We had only been a few hours in Devonshire, and that he should give up an investigation which he had begun so brilliantly was quite incomprehensible to me. ⁴²⁰Not a word more could I draw from him until we were back at the trainer's house. ⁴²¹The Colonel and the Inspector were awaiting us in the parlor.

⁴²²“My friend and I return to town by the night-express,” said Holmes. ⁴²³“We have had a charming little breath of your beautiful Dartmoor air.”

⁴²⁴The Inspector opened his eyes, and the Colonel's lip curled in a sneer.

⁴²⁵“So you despair of arresting the murderer of poor Straker,” said he.

⁴²⁶Holmes shrugged his shoulders. ⁴²⁷“There are certainly grave difficulties in the way,” said he. ⁴²⁸“I have every hope, however, that your horse will start upon Tuesday, and I beg that you will have your jockey in readiness. ⁴²⁹Might I ask for a photograph of Mr. John Straker?”

⁴³⁰The Inspector took one from an envelope and handed it to him.

⁴³¹"My dear Gregory, you anticipate all my wants. ⁴³²If I might ask you to wait here for an instant, I have a question which I should like to put to the maid."

⁴³³"I must say that I am rather disappointed in our London consultant," said Colonel Ross, bluntly, as my friend left the room. ⁴³⁴"I do not see that we are any further than when he came."

⁴³⁵"At least you have his assurance that your horse will run," said I.

⁴³⁶"Yes, I have his assurance," said the Colonel, with a shrug of his shoulders. ⁴³⁷"I should prefer to have the horse."

⁴³⁸I was about to make some reply in defence of my friend when he entered the room again.

⁴³⁹"Now, gentlemen," said he, "I am quite ready for Tavistock."

⁴⁴⁰As we stepped into the carriage one of the stable-lads held the door open for us. ⁴⁴¹A sudden idea seemed to occur to Holmes, for he leaned forward and touched the lad upon the sleeve.

⁴⁴²"You have a few sheep in the paddock," he said. ⁴⁴³"Who attends to them?"

⁴⁴⁴"I do, sir."

⁴⁴⁵"Have you noticed anything amiss with them of late?"

⁴⁴⁶"Well, sir, not of much account; but three of them have gone lame, sir."

⁴⁴⁷I could see that Holmes was extremely pleased, for he chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

⁴⁴⁸"A long shot, Watson; a very long shot," said he, pinching my arm. ⁴⁴⁹"Gregory, let me recommend to your attention this singular epidemic among the sheep. ⁴⁵⁰Drive on, coachman!"

⁴⁵¹Colonel Ross still wore an expression which showed the poor opinion which he had formed of my companion's ability, but I saw by the Inspector's face that his attention had been keenly aroused.

⁴⁵²"You consider that to be important?" he asked.

⁴⁵³"Exceedingly so."

⁴⁵⁴"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

⁴⁵⁵"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

⁴⁵⁶"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

⁴⁵⁷"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

⁴⁵⁸Four days later Holmes and I were again in the train, bound for Winchester to see the race for the Wessex Cup. ⁴⁵⁹Colonel Ross met us by appointment outside the station, and we drove in his drag to the course beyond the town. ⁴⁶⁰His face was grave, and his manner was cold in the extreme.

⁴⁶¹"I have seen nothing of my horse," said he.

⁴⁶²"I suppose that you would know him when you saw him?" asked Holmes.

⁴⁶³The Colonel was very angry. ⁴⁶⁴"I have been on the turf for twenty years, and never was asked such a question as that before," said he. ⁴⁶⁵"A child would know Silver Blaze, with his white forehead and his mottled off-foreleg."

⁴⁶⁶"How is the betting?"

⁴⁶⁷“Well, that is the curious part of it. ⁴⁶⁸You could have got fifteen to one yesterday, but the price has become shorter and shorter, until you can hardly get three to one now.”

⁴⁶⁹“Hum!” said Holmes. ⁴⁷⁰“Somebody knows something, that is clear.”

⁴⁷¹As the drag drew up in the enclosure near the grand stand I glanced at the card to see the entries.

⁴⁷²Wessex Plate [it ran] 50 sovs. each h ft with 1000 sovs. added, for four and five year olds. ⁴⁷³Second, £300. ⁴⁷⁴Third, £200. ⁴⁷⁵New course (one mile and five furlongs).

⁴⁷⁶1. Mr Heath Newton's The Negro. Red cap. Cinnamon jacket.

⁴⁷⁷2. Colonel Wardlaw's Pugilist. Pink cap. Blue and black jacket.

⁴⁷⁸3. Lord Backwater's Desborough. Yellow cap and sleeves.

⁴⁷⁹4. Colonel Ross's Silver Blaze. Black cap. Red jacket.

⁴⁸⁰5. Duke of Balmoral's Iris. Yellow and black stripes.

⁴⁸¹6. Lord Singleford's Rasper. Purple cap. Black sleeves.

⁴⁸²“We scratched our other one, and put all hopes on your word,” said the Colonel. ⁴⁸³“Why, what is that? ⁴⁸⁴Silver Blaze favorite?”

⁴⁸⁵“Five to four against Silver Blaze!” roared the ring. ⁴⁸⁶“Five to four against Silver Blaze! ⁴⁸⁷Five to fifteen against Desborough! ⁴⁸⁸Five to four on the field!”

⁴⁸⁹“There are the numbers up,” I cried. ⁴⁹⁰“They are all six there.”

⁴⁹¹“All six there? ⁴⁹²Then my horse is running,” cried the Colonel in great agitation. ⁴⁹³“But I don't see him. ⁴⁹⁴My colors have not passed.”

⁴⁹⁵“Only five have passed. ⁴⁹⁶This must be he.”

⁴⁹⁷As I spoke a powerful bay horse swept out from the weighting enclosure and cantered past us, bearing on its back the well-known black and red of the Colonel.

⁴⁹⁸“That's not my horse,” cried the owner. ⁴⁹⁹“That beast has not a white hair upon its body. ⁵⁰⁰What is this that you have done, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵⁰¹“Well, well, let us see how he gets on,” said my friend, imperturbably. ⁵⁰²For a few minutes he gazed through my field-glass. ⁵⁰³“Capital! ⁵⁰⁴An excellent start!” he cried suddenly. ⁵⁰⁵“There they are, coming round the curve!”

⁵⁰⁶From our drag we had a superb view as they came up the straight. ⁵⁰⁷The six horses were so close together that a carpet could have covered them, but half way up the yellow of the Mapleton stable showed to the front. ⁵⁰⁸Before they reached us, however, Desborough's bolt was shot, and the Colonel's horse, coming away with a rush, passed the post a good six lengths before its rival, the Duke of Balmoral's Iris making a bad third.

⁵⁰⁹“It's my race, anyhow,” gasped the Colonel, passing his hand over his eyes. ⁵¹⁰“I confess that I can make neither head nor tail of it. ⁵¹¹Don't you think that you have kept up your mystery long enough, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵¹²“Certainly, Colonel, you shall know everything. ⁵¹³Let us all go round and have a look at the horse together. ⁵¹⁴Here he is,” he continued, as we made our way into the weighing enclosure, where only owners and their friends find admittance. ⁵¹⁵“You have only to wash his face and his leg in spirits of wine, and you will find that he is the same old Silver Blaze as ever.”

⁵¹⁶“You take my breath away!”

⁵¹⁷“I found him in the hands of a faker, and took the liberty of running him just as he was sent over.”

⁵¹⁸“My dear sir, you have done wonders. ⁵¹⁹The horse looks very fit and well. ⁵²⁰It never went better in its life. ⁵²¹I owe you a thousand apologies for having doubted your ability. ⁵²²You have done me a great service by recovering my horse. ⁵²³You would do me a greater still if you could lay your hands on the murderer of John Straker.”

⁵²⁴“I have done so,” said Holmes quietly.

⁵²⁵The Colonel and I stared at him in amazement. ⁵²⁶“You have got him! ⁵²⁷Where is he, then?”

⁵²⁸“He is here.”

⁵²⁹“Here! ⁵³⁰Where?”

⁵³¹“In my company at the present moment.”

⁵³²The Colonel flushed angrily. ⁵³³“I quite recognize that I am under obligations to you, Mr. Holmes,” said he, “but I must regard what you have just said as either a very bad joke or an insult.”

⁵³⁴Sherlock Holmes laughed. ⁵³⁵“I assure you that I have not associated you with the crime, Colonel,” said he. ⁵³⁶“The real murderer is standing immediately behind you.” ⁵³⁷He stepped past and laid his hand upon the glossy neck of the thoroughbred.

⁵³⁸“The horse!” cried both the Colonel and myself.

⁵³⁹“Yes, the horse. ⁵⁴⁰And it may lessen his guilt if I say that it was done in self-defence, and that John Straker was a man who was entirely unworthy of your confidence. ⁵⁴¹But there goes the bell, and as I stand to win a little on this next race, I shall defer a lengthy explanation until a more fitting time.”

⁵⁴²We had the corner of a Pullman car to ourselves that evening as we whirled back to London, and I fancy that the journey was a short one to Colonel Ross as well as to myself, as we listened to our companion's narrative of the events which had occurred at the Dartmoor training-stables upon the Monday night, and the means by which he had unravelled them.

⁵⁴³“I confess,” said he, “that any theories which I had formed from the newspaper reports were entirely erroneous. ⁵⁴⁴And yet there were indications there, had they not been overlaid by other details which concealed their true import. ⁵⁴⁵I went to Devonshire with the conviction that Fitzroy Simpson was the true culprit, although, of course, I saw that the evidence against him was by no means complete. ⁵⁴⁶It was while I was in the carriage, just as we reached the trainer's house, that the immense significance of the curried mutton occurred to me. ⁵⁴⁷You may remember that I was distraught, and remained sitting after you had all alighted. ⁵⁴⁸I was marvelling in my own mind how I could possibly have overlooked so obvious a clue.”

⁵⁴⁹“I confess,” said the Colonel, “that even now I cannot see how it helps us.”

⁵⁵⁰“It was the first link in my chain of reasoning. ⁵⁵¹Powdered opium is by no means tasteless. ⁵⁵²The flavor is not disagreeable, but it is perceptible. ⁵⁵³Were it mixed with any ordinary dish the eater would undoubtedly detect it, and would probably eat no more. ⁵⁵⁴A curry was exactly the medium which would disguise this taste. ⁵⁵⁵By no possible supposition could this stranger, Fitzroy Simpson, have caused curry to be served in the trainer's family that night, and it is surely too monstrous a coincidence to suppose that he happened to come along with powdered opium upon the very night when a dish happened to be served which would disguise the flavor. ⁵⁵⁶That is unthinkable. ⁵⁵⁷Therefore Simpson becomes eliminated from the case, and our attention centers upon Straker and his wife, the only two people who could have chosen curried mutton for supper that night. ⁵⁵⁸The opium was added after the dish was set

aside for the stable-boy, for the others had the same for supper with no ill effects. ⁵⁵⁹Which of them, then, had access to that dish without the maid seeing them?

⁵⁶⁰“Before deciding that question I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog, for one true inference invariably suggests others. ⁵⁶¹The Simpson incident had shown me that a dog was kept in the stables, and yet, though some one had been in and had fetched out a horse, he had not barked enough to arouse the two lads in the loft. ⁵⁶²Obviously the midnight visitor was some one whom the dog knew well.

⁵⁶³“I was already convinced, or almost convinced, that John Straker went down to the stables in the dead of the night and took out Silver Blaze. ⁵⁶⁴For what purpose? ⁵⁶⁵For a dishonest one, obviously, or why should he drug his own stable-boy? ⁵⁶⁶And yet I was at a loss to know why. ⁵⁶⁷There have been cases before now where trainers have made sure of great sums of money by laying against their own horses, through agents, and then preventing them from winning by fraud. ⁵⁶⁸Sometimes it is a pulling jockey. ⁵⁶⁹Sometimes it is some surer and subtler means. ⁵⁷⁰What was it here? ⁵⁷¹I hoped that the contents of his pockets might help me to form a conclusion.

⁵⁷²“And they did so. ⁵⁷³You cannot have forgotten the singular knife which was found in the dead man's hand, a knife which certainly no sane man would choose for a weapon. ⁵⁷⁴It was, as Dr. Watson told us, a form of knife which is used for the most delicate operations known in surgery. ⁵⁷⁵And it was to be used for a delicate operation that night. ⁵⁷⁶You must know, with your wide experience of turf matters, Colonel Ross, that it is possible to make a slight nick upon the tendons of a horse's ham, and to do it subcutaneously, so as to leave absolutely no trace. ⁵⁷⁷A horse so treated would develop a slight lameness, which would be put down to a strain in exercise or a touch of rheumatism, but never to foul play.”

⁵⁷⁸“Villain! ⁵⁷⁹Scoundrel!” cried the Colonel.

⁵⁸⁰“We have here the explanation of why John Straker wished to take the horse out on to the moor. ⁵⁸¹So spirited a creature would have certainly roused the soundest of sleepers when it felt the prick of the knife. ⁵⁸²It was absolutely necessary to do it in the open air.”

⁵⁸³“I have been blind!” cried the Colonel. ⁵⁸⁴“Of course that was why he needed the candle, and struck the match.”

⁵⁸⁵“Undoubtedly. ⁵⁸⁶But in examining his belongings I was fortunate enough to discover not only the method of the crime, but even its motives. ⁵⁸⁷As a man of the world, Colonel, you know that men do not carry other people's bills about in their pockets. ⁵⁸⁸We have most of us quite enough to do to settle our own. ⁵⁸⁹I at once concluded that Straker was leading a double life, and keeping a second establishment. ⁵⁹⁰The nature of the bill showed that there was a lady in the case, and one who had expensive tastes. ⁵⁹¹Liberal as you are with your servants, one can hardly expect that they can buy twenty-guinea walking dresses for their ladies. ⁵⁹²I questioned Mrs. Straker as to the dress without her knowing it, and having satisfied myself that it had never reached her, I made a note of the milliner's address, and felt that by calling there with Straker's photograph I could easily dispose of the mythical Derbyshire.

⁵⁹³“From that time on all was plain. ⁵⁹⁴Straker had led out the horse to a hollow where his light would be invisible. ⁵⁹⁵Simpson in his flight had dropped his cravat, and Straker had picked it up—with some idea, perhaps, that he might use it in securing the horse's leg. ⁵⁹⁶Once in the hollow, he had got behind the horse and had struck a light; but the creature frightened at the sudden glare, and with the strange instinct of animals feeling that some mischief was intended, had lashed out, and the steel shoe had struck Straker full on the forehead. ⁵⁹⁷He had already, in spite of the rain, taken off his overcoat in order to do his delicate task, and so, as he fell, his knife gashed his thigh. ⁵⁹⁸Do I make it clear?”

⁵⁹⁹“Wonderful!” cried the Colonel. ⁶⁰⁰“Wonderful! ⁶⁰¹You might have been there!”

⁶⁰²“My final shot was, I confess a very long one. ⁶⁰³It struck me that so astute a man as Straker would not undertake this delicate tendon-nicking without a little practice. ⁶⁰⁴What could he practice on? ⁶⁰⁵My eyes fell upon the sheep, and I asked a question which, rather to my surprise, showed that my surmise was correct.

⁶⁰⁶“When I returned to London I called upon the milliner, who had recognized Straker as an excellent customer of the name of Derbyshire, who had a very dashing wife, with a strong partiality for expensive dresses. ⁶⁰⁷I have no doubt that this woman had plunged him over head and ears in debt, and so led him into this miserable plot.”

⁶⁰⁸“You have explained all but one thing,” cried the Colonel. ⁶⁰⁹“Where was the horse?”

⁶¹⁰“Ah, it bolted, and was cared for by one of your neighbors. ⁶¹¹We must have an amnesty in that direction, I think. ⁶¹²This is Clapham Junction, if I am not mistaken, and we shall be in Victoria in less than ten minutes. ⁶¹³If you care to smoke a cigar in our rooms, Colonel, I shall be happy to give you any other details which might interest you.”

The Adventure of the Cardboard Box

¹In choosing a few typical cases which illustrate the remarkable mental qualities of my friend, Sherlock Holmes, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to select those which presented the minimum of sensationalism, while offering a fair field for his talents. ²It is, however, unfortunately impossible entirely to separate the sensational from the criminal, and a chronicler is left in the dilemma that he must either sacrifice details which are essential to his statement and so give a false impression of the problem, or he must use matter which chance, and not choice, has provided him with. ³With this short preface I shall turn to my notes of what proved to be a strange, though a peculiarly terrible, chain of events.

⁴It was a blazing hot day in August. ⁵Baker Street was like an oven, and the glare of the sunlight upon the yellow brickwork of the house across the road was painful to the eye. ⁶It was hard to believe that these were the same walls which loomed so gloomily through the fogs of winter. ⁷Our blinds were half-drawn, and Holmes lay curled upon the sofa, reading and re-reading a letter which he had received by the morning post. ⁸For myself, my term of service in India had trained me to stand heat better than cold, and a thermometer at ninety was no hardship. ⁹But the morning paper was uninteresting. ¹⁰Parliament had risen. ¹¹Everybody was out of town, and I yearned for the glades of the New Forest or the shingle of Southsea. ¹²A depleted bank account had caused me to postpone my holiday, and as to my companion, neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. ¹³He loved to lie in the very center of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime. ¹⁴Appreciation of nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.

¹⁵Finding that Holmes was too absorbed for conversation I had tossed aside the barren paper, and leaning back in my chair I fell into a brown study. ¹⁶Suddenly my companion's voice broke in upon my thoughts:

¹⁷"You are right, Watson," said he. ¹⁸"It does seem a most preposterous way of settling a dispute."

¹⁹"Most preposterous!" I exclaimed, and then suddenly realizing how he had echoed the inmost thought of my soul, I sat up in my chair and stared at him in blank amazement.

²⁰"What is this, Holmes?" I cried. ²¹"This is beyond anything which I could have imagined."

²²He laughed heartily at my perplexity.

²³"You remember," said he, "that some little time ago when I read you the passage in one of Poe's sketches in which a close reasoner follows the unspoken thoughts of his companion, you were inclined to treat the matter as a mere tour-de-force of the author. ²⁴On my remarking that I was constantly in the habit of doing the same thing you expressed incredulity."

²⁵"Oh, no!"

²⁶"Perhaps not with your tongue, my dear Watson, but certainly with your eyebrows. ²⁷So when I saw you throw down your paper and enter upon a train of thought, I was very happy to have the opportunity of reading it off, and eventually of breaking into it, as a proof that I had been in rapport with you."

²⁸But I was still far from satisfied. ²⁹"In the example which you read to me," said I, "the reasoner drew his conclusions from the actions of the man whom he observed. ³⁰If I remember right, he stumbled over a heap of stones, looked up at the stars, and so on. ³¹But I have been seated quietly in my chair, and what clues can I have given you?"

³²“You do yourself an injustice. ³³The features are given to man as the means by which he shall express his emotions, and yours are faithful servants.”

³⁴“Do you mean to say that you read my train of thoughts from my features?”

³⁵“Your features and especially your eyes. ³⁶Perhaps you cannot yourself recall how your reverie commenced?”

³⁷“No, I cannot.”

³⁸“Then I will tell you. ³⁹After throwing down your paper, which was the action which drew my attention to you, you sat for half a minute with a vacant expression. ⁴⁰Then your eyes fixed themselves upon your newly framed picture of General Gordon, and I saw by the alteration in your face that a train of thought had been started. ⁴¹But it did not lead very far. ⁴²Your eyes flashed across to the unframed portrait of Henry Ward Beecher which stands upon the top of your books. ⁴³Then you glanced up at the wall, and of course your meaning was obvious. ⁴⁴You were thinking that if the portrait were framed it would just cover that bare space and correspond with Gordon's picture there.”

⁴⁵“You have followed me wonderfully!” I exclaimed.

⁴⁶“So far I could hardly have gone astray. ⁴⁷But now your thoughts went back to Beecher, and you looked hard across as if you were studying the character in his features. ⁴⁸Then your eyes ceased to pucker, but you continued to look across, and your face was thoughtful. ⁴⁹You were recalling the incidents of Beecher's career. ⁵⁰I was well aware that you could not do this without thinking of the mission which he undertook on behalf of the North at the time of the Civil War, for I remember your expressing your passionate indignation at the way in which he was received by the more turbulent of our people. ⁵¹You felt so strongly about it that I knew you could not think of Beecher without thinking of that also. ⁵²When a moment later I saw your eyes wander away from the picture, I suspected that your mind had now turned to the Civil War, and when I observed that your lips set, your eyes sparkled, and your hands clenched I was positive that you were indeed thinking of the gallantry which was shown by both sides in that desperate struggle. ⁵³But then, again, your face grew sadder, you shook your head. ⁵⁴You were dwelling upon the sadness and horror and useless waste of life. ⁵⁵Your hand stole towards your own old wound and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling international questions had forced itself upon your mind. ⁵⁶At this point I agreed with you that it was preposterous and was glad to find that all my deductions had been correct.”

⁵⁷“Absolutely!” said I. ⁵⁸“And now that you have explained it, I confess that I am as amazed as before.”

⁵⁹“It was very superficial, my dear Watson, I assure you. ⁶⁰I should not have intruded it upon your attention had you not shown some incredulity the other day. ⁶¹But I have in my hands here a little problem which may prove to be more difficult of solution than my small essay in thought reading. ⁶²Have you observed in the paper a short paragraph referring to the remarkable contents of a packet sent through the post to Miss Cushing, of Cross Street, Croydon?”

⁶³“No, I saw nothing.”

⁶⁴“Ah! then you must have overlooked it. ⁶⁵Just toss it over to me. ⁶⁶Here it is, under the financial column. ⁶⁷Perhaps you would be good enough to read it aloud.”

⁶⁸I picked up the paper which he had thrown back to me and read the paragraph indicated. ⁶⁹It was headed, “A Gruesome Packet.”

⁷⁰“Miss Susan Cushing, living at Cross Street, Croydon, has been made the victim of what must be regarded as a peculiarly revolting practical joke unless some more sinister meaning should prove to be attached to the incident. ⁷¹At two o'clock yesterday afternoon a small packet, wrapped in brown paper, was handed in by the postman. ⁷²A cardboard box was inside, which was filled with coarse salt. ⁷³On

emptying this, Miss Cushing was horrified to find two human ears, apparently quite freshly severed. ⁷⁴The box had been sent by parcel post from Belfast upon the morning before. ⁷⁵There is no indication as to the sender, and the matter is the more mysterious as Miss Cushing, who is a maiden lady of fifty, has led a most retired life, and has so few acquaintances or correspondents that it is a rare event for her to receive anything through the post. ⁷⁶Some years ago, however, when she resided at Penge, she let apartments in her house to three young medical students, whom she was obliged to get rid of on account of their noisy and irregular habits. ⁷⁷The police are of opinion that this outrage may have been perpetrated upon Miss Cushing by these youths, who owed her a grudge and who hoped to frighten her by sending her these relics of the dissecting-rooms. ⁷⁸Some probability is lent to the theory by the fact that one of these students came from the north of Ireland, and, to the best of Miss Cushing's belief, from Belfast. ⁷⁹In the meantime, the matter is being actively investigated, Mr. Lestrade, one of the very smartest of our detective officers, being in charge of the case."

⁸⁰"So much for the Daily Chronicle," said Holmes as I finished reading. ⁸¹"Now for our friend Lestrade. ⁸²I had a note from him this morning, in which he says:

⁸³"I think that this case is very much in your line. ⁸⁴We have every hope of clearing the matter up, but we find a little difficulty in getting anything to work upon. ⁸⁵We have, of course, wired to the Belfast post-office, but a large number of parcels were handed in upon that day, and they have no means of identifying this particular one, or of remembering the sender. ⁸⁶The box is a half-pound box of honeydew tobacco and does not help us in any way. ⁸⁷The medical student theory still appears to me to be the most feasible, but if you should have a few hours to spare I should be very happy to see you out here. ⁸⁸I shall be either at the house or in the police-station all day.

⁸⁹"What say you, Watson? ⁹⁰Can you rise superior to the heat and run down to Croydon with me on the off chance of a case for your annals?"

⁹¹"I was longing for something to do."

⁹²"You shall have it then. ⁹³Ring for our boots and tell them to order a cab. ⁹⁴I'll be back in a moment when I have changed my dressing-gown and filled my cigar-case."

⁹⁵A shower of rain fell while we were in the train, and the heat was far less oppressive in Croydon than in town. ⁹⁶Holmes had sent on a wire, so that Lestrade, as wiry, as dapper, and as ferret-like as ever, was waiting for us at the station. ⁹⁷A walk of five minutes took us to Cross Street, where Miss Cushing resided.

⁹⁸It was a very long street of two-story brick houses, neat and prim, with whitened stone steps and little groups of aproned women gossiping at the doors. ⁹⁹Halfway down, Lestrade stopped and tapped at a door, which was opened by a small servant girl. ¹⁰⁰Miss Cushing was sitting in the front room, into which we were ushered. ¹⁰¹She was a placid-faced woman, with large, gentle eyes, and grizzled hair curving down over her temples on each side. ¹⁰²A worked antimacassar lay upon her lap and a basket of coloured silks stood upon a stool beside her.

¹⁰³"They are in the outhouse, those dreadful things," said she as Lestrade entered. ¹⁰⁴"I wish that you would take them away altogether."

¹⁰⁵"So I shall, Miss Cushing. ¹⁰⁶I only kept them here until my friend, Mr. Holmes, should have seen them in your presence."

¹⁰⁷"Why in my presence, sir?"

¹⁰⁸"In case he wished to ask any questions."

¹⁰⁹"What is the use of asking me questions when I tell you I know nothing whatever about it?"

¹¹⁰“Quite so, madam,” said Holmes in his soothing way. ¹¹¹“I have no doubt that you have been annoyed more than enough already over this business.”

¹¹²“Indeed I have, sir. ¹¹³I am a quiet woman and live a retired life. ¹¹⁴It is something new for me to see my name in the papers and to find the police in my house. ¹¹⁵I won't have those things in here, Mr. Lestrade. ¹¹⁶If you wish to see them you must go to the outhouse.”

¹¹⁷It was a small shed in the narrow garden which ran behind the house. ¹¹⁸Lestrade went in and brought out a yellow cardboard box, with a piece of brown paper and some string. ¹¹⁹There was a bench at the end of the path, and we all sat down while Holmes examined one by one, the articles which Lestrade had handed to him.

¹²⁰“The string is exceedingly interesting,” he remarked, holding it up to the light and sniffing at it.

¹²¹“What do you make of this string, Lestrade?”

¹²²“It has been tarred.”

¹²³“Precisely. ¹²⁴It is a piece of tarred twine. ¹²⁵You have also, no doubt, remarked that Miss Cushing has cut the cord with a scissors, as can be seen by the double fray on each side. ¹²⁶This is of importance.”

¹²⁷“I cannot see the importance,” said Lestrade.

¹²⁸“The importance lies in the fact that the knot is left intact, and that this knot is of a peculiar character.”

¹²⁹“It is very neatly tied. ¹³⁰I had already made a note of that effect,” said Lestrade complacently.

¹³¹“So much for the string, then,” said Holmes, smiling, “now for the box wrapper. ¹³²Brown paper, with a distinct smell of coffee. ¹³³What, did you not observe it? ¹³⁴I think there can be no doubt of it. ¹³⁵Address printed in rather straggling characters: ‘Miss S. Cushing, Cross Street, Croydon.’ ¹³⁶Done with a broad-pointed pen, probably a J, and with very inferior ink. ¹³⁷The word ‘Croydon’ has been originally spelled with an ‘i’, which has been changed to ‘y’. ¹³⁸The parcel was directed, then, by a man—the printing is distinctly masculine—of limited education and unacquainted with the town of Croydon. ¹³⁹So far, so good! ¹⁴⁰The box is a yellow, half-pound honeydew box, with nothing distinctive save two thumb marks at the left bottom corner. ¹⁴¹It is filled with rough salt of the quality used for preserving hides and other of the coarser commercial purposes. ¹⁴²And embedded in it are these very singular enclosures.”

¹⁴³He took out the two ears as he spoke, and laying a board across his knee he examined them minutely, while Lestrade and I, bending forward on each side of him, glanced alternately at these dreadful relics and at the thoughtful, eager face of our companion. ¹⁴⁴Finally he returned them to the box once more and sat for a while in deep meditation.

¹⁴⁵“You have observed, of course,” said he at last, “that the ears are not a pair.”

¹⁴⁶“Yes, I have noticed that. ¹⁴⁷But if this were the practical joke of some students from the dissecting-rooms, it would be as easy for them to send two odd ears as a pair.”

¹⁴⁸“Precisely. ¹⁴⁹But this is not a practical joke.”

¹⁵⁰“You are sure of it?”

¹⁵¹“The presumption is strongly against it. ¹⁵²Bodies in the dissecting-rooms are injected with preservative fluid. ¹⁵³These ears bear no signs of this. ¹⁵⁴They are fresh, too. ¹⁵⁵They have been cut off with a blunt instrument, which would hardly happen if a student had done it. ¹⁵⁶Again, carbolic or rectified spirits would be the preservatives which would suggest themselves to the medical mind, certainly not rough salt. ¹⁵⁷I repeat that there is no practical joke here, but that we are investigating a serious crime.”

¹⁵⁸A vague thrill ran through me as I listened to my companion's words and saw the stern gravity which had hardened his features. ¹⁵⁹This brutal preliminary seemed to shadow forth some strange and inexplicable horror in the background. ¹⁶⁰Lestrade, however, shook his head like a man who is only half convinced.

¹⁶¹"There are objections to the joke theory, no doubt," said he, "but there are much stronger reasons against the other. ¹⁶²We know that this woman has led a most quiet and respectable life at Penge and here for the last twenty years. ¹⁶³She has hardly been away from her home for a day during that time. ¹⁶⁴Why on earth, then, should any criminal send her the proofs of his guilt, especially as, unless she is a most consummate actress, she understands quite as little of the matter as we do?"

¹⁶⁵"That is the problem which we have to solve," Holmes answered, "and for my part I shall set about it by presuming that my reasoning is correct, and that a double murder has been committed. ¹⁶⁶One of these ears is a woman's, small, finely formed, and pierced for an earring. ¹⁶⁷The other is a man's, sun-burned, discoloured, and also pierced for an earring. ¹⁶⁸These two people are presumably dead, or we should have heard their story before now. ¹⁶⁹To-day is Friday. ¹⁷⁰The packet was posted on Thursday morning. ¹⁷¹The tragedy, then, occurred on Wednesday or Tuesday, or earlier. ¹⁷²If the two people were murdered, who but their murderer would have sent this sign of his work to Miss Cushing? ¹⁷³We may take it that the sender of the packet is the man whom we want. ¹⁷⁴But he must have some strong reason for sending Miss Cushing this packet. ¹⁷⁵What reason then? ¹⁷⁶It must have been to tell her that the deed was done; or to pain her, perhaps. ¹⁷⁷But in that case she knows who it is. ¹⁷⁸Does she know? ¹⁷⁹I doubt it. ¹⁸⁰If she knew, why should she call the police in? ¹⁸¹She might have buried the ears, and no one would have been the wiser. ¹⁸²That is what she would have done if she had wished to shield the criminal. ¹⁸³But if she does not wish to shield him she would give his name. ¹⁸⁴There is a tangle here which needs straightening out." ¹⁸⁵He had been talking in a high, quick voice, staring blankly up over the garden fence, but now he sprang briskly to his feet and walked towards the house.

¹⁸⁶"I have a few questions to ask Miss Cushing," said he.

¹⁸⁷"In that case I may leave you here," said Lestrade, "for I have another small business on hand. ¹⁸⁸I think that I have nothing further to learn from Miss Cushing. ¹⁸⁹You will find me at the police-station."

¹⁹⁰"We shall look in on our way to the train," answered Holmes. ¹⁹¹A moment later he and I were back in the front room, where the impassive lady was still quietly working away at her antimacassar. ¹⁹²She put it down on her lap as we entered and looked at us with her frank, searching blue eyes.

¹⁹³"I am convinced, sir," she said, "that this matter is a mistake, and that the parcel was never meant for me at all. ¹⁹⁴I have said this several times to the gentlemen from Scotland Yard, but he simply laughs at me. ¹⁹⁵I have not an enemy in the world, as far as I know, so why should anyone play me such a trick?"

¹⁹⁶"I am coming to be of the same opinion, Miss Cushing," said Holmes, taking a seat beside her. ¹⁹⁷"I think that it is more than probable—" ¹⁹⁸He paused, and I was surprised, on glancing round to see that he was staring with singular intentness at the lady's profile. ¹⁹⁹Surprise and satisfaction were both for an instant to be read upon his eager face, though when she glanced round to find out the cause of his silence he had become as demure as ever. ²⁰⁰I stared hard myself at her flat, grizzled hair, her trim cap, her little gilt earrings, her placid features; but I could see nothing which could account for my companion's evident excitement.

²⁰¹"There were one or two questions—"

²⁰²"Oh, I am weary of questions!" cried Miss Cushing impatiently.

²⁰³"You have two sisters, I believe."

²⁰⁴"How could you know that?"

²⁰⁵“I observed the very instant that I entered the room that you have a portrait group of three ladies upon the mantelpiece, one of whom is undoubtedly yourself, while the others are so exceedingly like you that there could be no doubt of the relationship.”

²⁰⁶“Yes, you are quite right. ²⁰⁷Those are my sisters, Sarah and Mary.”

²⁰⁸“And here at my elbow is another portrait, taken at Liverpool, of your younger sister, in the company of a man who appears to be a steward by his uniform. ²⁰⁹I observe that she was unmarried at the time.”

²¹⁰“You are very quick at observing.”

²¹¹“That is my trade.”

²¹²“Well, you are quite right. ²¹³But she was married to Mr. Browner a few days afterwards. ²¹⁴He was on the South American line when that was taken, but he was so fond of her that he couldn't abide to leave her for so long, and he got into the Liverpool and London boats.”

²¹⁵“Ah, the Conqueror, perhaps?”

²¹⁶“No, the May Day, when last I heard. ²¹⁷Jim came down here to see me once. ²¹⁸That was before he broke the pledge; but afterwards he would always take drink when he was ashore, and a little drink would send him stark, staring mad. ²¹⁹Ah! it was a bad day that ever he took a glass in his hand again. ²²⁰First he dropped me, then he quarrelled with Sarah, and now that Mary has stopped writing we don't know how things are going with them.”

²²¹It was evident that Miss Cushing had come upon a subject on which she felt very deeply. ²²²Like most people who lead a lonely life, she was shy at first, but ended by becoming extremely communicative. ²²³She told us many details about her brother-in-law the steward, and then wandering off on the subject of her former lodgers, the medical students, she gave us a long account of their delinquencies, with their names and those of their hospitals. ²²⁴Holmes listened attentively to everything, throwing in a question from time to time.

²²⁵“About your second sister, Sarah,” said he. ²²⁶“I wonder, since you are both maiden ladies, that you do not keep house together.”

²²⁷“Ah! you don't know Sarah's temper or you would wonder no more. ²²⁸I tried it when I came to Croydon, and we kept on until about two months ago, when we had to part. ²²⁹I don't want to say a word against my own sister, but she was always meddlesome and hard to please, was Sarah.”

²³⁰“You say that she quarrelled with your Liverpool relations.”

²³¹“Yes, and they were the best of friends at one time. ²³²Why, she went up there to live in order to be near them. ²³³And now she has no word hard enough for Jim Browner. ²³⁴The last six months that she was here she would speak of nothing but his drinking and his ways. ²³⁵He had caught her meddling, I suspect, and given her a bit of his mind, and that was the start of it.”

²³⁶“Thank you, Miss Cushing,” said Holmes, rising and bowing. ²³⁷“Your sister Sarah lives, I think you said, at New Street, Wallington? ²³⁸Good-bye, and I am very sorry that you should have been troubled over a case with which, as you say, you have nothing whatever to do.”

²³⁹There was a cab passing as we came out, and Holmes hailed it.

²⁴⁰“How far to Wallington?” he asked.

²⁴¹“Only about a mile, sir.”

²⁴²“Very good. ²⁴³Jump in, Watson. ²⁴⁴We must strike while the iron is hot. ²⁴⁵Simple as the case is, there have been one or two very instructive details in connection with it. ²⁴⁶Just pull up at a telegraph office as you pass, cabby.”

²⁴⁷Holmes sent off a short wire and for the rest of the drive lay back in the cab, with his hat tilted over his nose to keep the sun from his face. ²⁴⁸Our drive pulled up at a house which was not unlike the one which we had just quitted. ²⁴⁹My companion ordered him to wait, and had his hand upon the knocker, when the door opened and a grave young gentleman in black, with a very shiny hat, appeared on the step.

²⁵⁰“Is Miss Cushing at home?” asked Holmes.

²⁵¹“Miss Sarah Cushing is extremely ill,” said he. ²⁵²“She has been suffering since yesterday from brain symptoms of great severity. ²⁵³As her medical adviser, I cannot possibly take the responsibility of allowing anyone to see her. ²⁵⁴I should recommend you to call again in ten days.” ²⁵⁵He drew on his gloves, closed the door, and marched off down the street.

²⁵⁶“Well, if we can't we can't,” said Holmes, cheerfully.

²⁵⁷“Perhaps she could not or would not have told you much.”

²⁵⁸“I did not wish her to tell me anything. ²⁵⁹I only wanted to look at her. ²⁶⁰However, I think that I have got all that I want. ²⁶¹Drive us to some decent hotel, cabby, where we may have some lunch, and afterwards we shall drop down upon friend Lestrade at the police-station.”

²⁶²We had a pleasant little meal together, during which Holmes would talk about nothing but violins, narrating with great exultation how he had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas, at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings. ²⁶³This led him to Paganini, and we sat for an hour over a bottle of claret while he told me anecdote after anecdote of that extraordinary man. ²⁶⁴The afternoon was far advanced and the hot glare had softened into a mellow glow before we found ourselves at the police-station. ²⁶⁵Lestrade was waiting for us at the door.

²⁶⁶“A telegram for you, Mr. Holmes,” said he.

²⁶⁷“Ha! ²⁶⁸It is the answer!” ²⁶⁹He tore it open, glanced his eyes over it, and crumpled it into his pocket.

²⁷⁰“That's all right,” said he.

²⁷¹“Have you found out anything?”

²⁷²“I have found out everything!”

²⁷³“What!” ²⁷⁴Lestrade stared at him in amazement. ²⁷⁵“You are joking.”

²⁷⁶“I was never more serious in my life. ²⁷⁷A shocking crime has been committed, and I think I have now laid bare every detail of it.”

²⁷⁸“And the criminal?”

²⁷⁹Holmes scribbled a few words upon the back of one of his visiting cards and threw it over to Lestrade.

²⁸⁰“That is the name,” he said. ²⁸¹“You cannot effect an arrest until to-morrow night at the earliest. ²⁸²I should prefer that you do not mention my name at all in connection with the case, as I choose to be only associated with those crimes which present some difficulty in their solution. ²⁸³Come on, Watson.”

²⁸⁴We strode off together to the station, leaving Lestrade still staring with a delighted face at the card which Holmes had thrown him.

²⁸⁵“The case,” said Sherlock Holmes as we chatted over our cigars that night in our rooms at Baker Street, “is one where, as in the investigations which you have chronicled under the names of ‘A Study in

Scarlet' and of 'The Sign of Four,' we have been compelled to reason backward from effects to causes. ²⁸⁶I have written to Lestrade asking him to supply us with the details which are now wanting, and which he will only get after he had secured his man. ²⁸⁷That he may be safely trusted to do, for although he is absolutely devoid of reason, he is as tenacious as a bulldog when he once understands what he has to do, and indeed, it is just this tenacity which has brought him to the top at Scotland Yard."

²⁸⁸"Your case is not complete, then?" I asked.

²⁸⁹"It is fairly complete in essentials. ²⁹⁰We know who the author of the revolting business is, although one of the victims still escapes us. ²⁹¹Of course, you have formed your own conclusions."

²⁹²"I presume that this Jim Browner, the steward of a Liverpool boat, is the man whom you suspect?"

²⁹³"Oh! it is more than a suspicion."

²⁹⁴"And yet I cannot see anything save very vague indications."

²⁹⁵"On the contrary, to my mind nothing could be more clear. ²⁹⁶Let me run over the principal steps. ²⁹⁷We approached the case, you remember, with an absolutely blank mind, which is always an advantage. ²⁹⁸We had formed no theories. ²⁹⁹We were simply there to observe and to draw inferences from our observations. ³⁰⁰What did we see first? ³⁰¹A very placid and respectable lady, who seemed quite innocent of any secret, and a portrait which showed me that she had two younger sisters. ³⁰²It instantly flashed across my mind that the box might have been meant for one of these. ³⁰³I set the idea aside as one which could be disproved or confirmed at our leisure. ³⁰⁴Then we went to the garden, as you remember, and we saw the very singular contents of the little yellow box.

³⁰⁵"The string was of the quality which is used by sail-makers aboard ship, and at once a whiff of the sea was perceptible in our investigation. ³⁰⁶When I observed that the knot was one which is popular with sailors, that the parcel had been posted at a port, and that the male ear was pierced for an earring which is so much more common among sailors than landmen, I was quite certain that all the actors in the tragedy were to be found among our seafaring classes.

³⁰⁷"When I came to examine the address of the packet I observed that it was to Miss S. Cushing. ³⁰⁸Now, the oldest sister would, of course, be Miss Cushing, and although her initial was 'S' it might belong to one of the others as well. ³⁰⁹In that case we should have to commence our investigation from a fresh basis altogether. ³¹⁰I therefore went into the house with the intention of clearing up this point. ³¹¹I was about to assure Miss Cushing that I was convinced that a mistake had been made when you may remember that I came suddenly to a stop. ³¹²The fact was that I had just seen something which filled me with surprise and at the same time narrowed the field of our inquiry immensely.

³¹³"As a medical man, you are aware, Watson, that there is no part of the body which varies so much as the human ear. ³¹⁴Each ear is as a rule quite distinctive and differs from all other ones. ³¹⁵In last year's Anthropological Journal you will find two short monographs from my pen upon the subject. ³¹⁶I had, therefore, examined the ears in the box with the eyes of an expert and had carefully noted their anatomical peculiarities. ³¹⁷Imagine my surprise, then, when on looking at Miss Cushing I perceived that her ear corresponded exactly with the female ear which I had just inspected. ³¹⁸The matter was entirely beyond coincidence. ³¹⁹There was the same shortening of the pinna, the same broad curve of the upper lobe, the same convolution of the inner cartilage. ³²⁰In all essentials it was the same ear.

³²¹"In the first place, her sister's name was Sarah, and her address had until recently been the same, so that it was quite obvious how the mistake had occurred and for whom the packet was meant. ³²²Then we heard of this steward, married to the third sister, and learned that he had at one time been so intimate with Miss Sarah that she had actually gone up to Liverpool to be near the Browners, but a quarrel had afterwards divided them. ³²³This quarrel had put a stop to all communications for some months, so that

if Browner had occasion to address a packet to Miss Sarah, he would undoubtedly have done so to her old address.

³²⁴“And now the matter had begun to straighten itself out wonderfully. ³²⁵We had learned of the existence of this steward, an impulsive man, of strong passions—you remember that he threw up what must have been a very superior berth in order to be nearer to his wife—subject, too, to occasional fits of hard drinking. ³²⁶We had reason to believe that his wife had been murdered, and that a man—presumably a seafaring man—had been murdered at the same time. ³²⁷Jealousy, of course, at once suggests itself as the motive for the crime. ³²⁸And why should these proofs of the deed be sent to Miss Sarah Cushing? ³²⁹Probably because during her residence in Liverpool she had some hand in bringing about the events which led to the tragedy. ³³⁰You will observe that this line of boats call at Belfast, Dublin, and Waterford; so that, presuming that Browner had committed the deed and had embarked at once upon his steamer, the May Day, Belfast would be the first place at which he could post his terrible packet.

³³¹“A second solution was at this stage obviously possible, and although I thought it exceedingly unlikely, I was determined to elucidate it before going further. ³³²An unsuccessful lover might have killed Mr. and Mrs. Browner, and the male ear might have belonged to the husband. ³³³There were many grave objections to this theory, but it was conceivable. ³³⁴I therefore sent off a telegram to my friend Algar, of the Liverpool force, and asked him to find out if Mrs. Browner were at home, and if Browner had departed in the May Day. ³³⁵Then we went on to Wallington to visit Miss Sarah.

³³⁶“I was curious, in the first place, to see how far the family ear had been reproduced in her. ³³⁷Then, of course, she might give us very important information, but I was not sanguine that she would. ³³⁸She must have heard of the business the day before, since all Croydon was ringing with it, and she alone could have understood for whom the packet was meant. ³³⁹If she had been willing to help justice she would probably have communicated with the police already. ³⁴⁰However, it was clearly our duty to see her, so we went. ³⁴¹We found that the news of the arrival of the packet—for her illness dated from that time—had such an effect upon her as to bring on brain fever. ³⁴²It was clearer than ever that she understood its full significance, but equally clear that we should have to wait some time for any assistance from her.

³⁴³“However, we were really independent of her help. ³⁴⁴Our answers were waiting for us at the police-station, where I had directed Algar to send them. ³⁴⁵Nothing could be more conclusive. Mrs. Browner's house had been closed for more than three days, and the neighbours were of opinion that she had gone south to see her relatives. ³⁴⁶It had been ascertained at the shipping offices that Browner had left aboard of the May Day, and I calculate that she is due in the Thames tomorrow night. ³⁴⁷When he arrives he will be met by the obtuse but resolute Lestrade, and I have no doubt that we shall have all our details filled in.”

³⁴⁸Sherlock Holmes was not disappointed in his expectations. ³⁴⁹Two days later he received a bulky envelope, which contained a short note from the detective, and a typewritten document, which covered several pages of foolscap.

³⁵⁰“Lestrade has got him all right,” said Holmes, glancing up at me. ³⁵¹“Perhaps it would interest you to hear what he says.

³⁵²“My dear Mr. Holmes:

³⁵³“In accordance with the scheme which we had formed in order to test our theories” [“the ‘we’ is rather fine, Watson, is it not?”] “I went down to the Albert Dock yesterday at 6 p.m., and boarded the S.S. May Day, belonging to the Liverpool, Dublin, and London Steam Packet Company. ³⁵⁴On inquiry, I found that there was a steward on board of the name of James Browner and that he had acted during the voyage in such an extraordinary manner that the captain had been compelled to relieve him of his

duties. ³⁵⁵On descending to his berth, I found him seated upon a chest with his head sunk upon his hands, rocking himself to and fro. ³⁵⁶He is a big, powerful chap, clean-shaven, and very swarthy—something like Aldrige, who helped us in the bogus laundry affair. ³⁵⁷He jumped up when he heard my business, and I had my whistle to my lips to call a couple of river police, who were round the corner, but he seemed to have no heart in him, and he held out his hands quietly enough for the darbies. ³⁵⁸We brought him along to the cells, and his box as well, for we thought there might be something incriminating; but, bar a big sharp knife such as most sailors have, we got nothing for our trouble. ³⁵⁹However, we find that we shall want no more evidence, for on being brought before the inspector at the station he asked leave to make a statement, which was, of course, taken down, just as he made it, by our shorthand man. ³⁶⁰We had three copies typewritten, one of which I enclose. ³⁶¹The affair proves, as I always thought it would, to be an extremely simple one, but I am obliged to you for assisting me in my investigation. ³⁶²With kind regards,

³⁶³“Yours very truly,

³⁶⁴“G. Lestrade.

³⁶⁵“Hum! ³⁶⁶The investigation really was a very simple one,” remarked Holmes, “but I don't think it struck him in that light when he first called us in. ³⁶⁷However, let us see what Jim Browner has to say for himself. ³⁶⁸This is his statement as made before Inspector Montgomery at the Shadwell Police Station, and it has the advantage of being verbatim.”

³⁶⁹““Have I anything to say? ³⁷⁰Yes, I have a deal to say. ³⁷¹I have to make a clean breast of it all. ³⁷²You can hang me, or you can leave me alone. ³⁷³I don't care a plug which you do. ³⁷⁴I tell you I've not shut an eye in sleep since I did it, and I don't believe I ever will again until I get past all waking. ³⁷⁵Sometimes it's his face, but most generally it's hers. ³⁷⁶I'm never without one or the other before me. ³⁷⁷He looks frowning and black-like, but she has a kind o' surprise upon her face. ³⁷⁸Ay, the white lamb, she might well be surprised when she read death on a face that had seldom looked anything but love upon her before.

³⁷⁹““But it was Sarah's fault, and may the curse of a broken man put a blight on her and set the blood rotting in her veins! ³⁸⁰It's not that I want to clear myself. ³⁸¹I know that I went back to drink, like the beast that I was. ³⁸²But she would have forgiven me; she would have stuck as close to me as a rope to a block if that woman had never darkened our door. ³⁸³For Sarah Cushing loved me—that's the root of the business—she loved me until all her love turned to poisonous hate when she knew that I thought more of my wife's footmark in the mud than I did of her whole body and soul.

³⁸⁴““There were three sisters altogether. ³⁸⁵The old one was just a good woman, the second was a devil, and the third was an angel. ³⁸⁶Sarah was thirty-three, and Mary was twenty-nine when I married. ³⁸⁷We were just as happy as the day was long when we set up house together, and in all Liverpool there was no better woman than my Mary. ³⁸⁸And then we asked Sarah up for a week, and the week grew into a month, and one thing led to another, until she was just one of ourselves.

³⁸⁹““I was blue ribbon at that time, and we were putting a little money by, and all was as bright as a new dollar. ³⁹⁰My God, whoever would have thought that it could have come to this? ³⁹¹Whoever would have dreamed it?

³⁹²““I used to be home for the week-ends very often, and sometimes if the ship were held back for cargo I would have a whole week at a time, and in this way I saw a deal of my sister-in-law, Sarah. ³⁹³She was a fine tall woman, black and quick and fierce, with a proud way of carrying her head, and a glint from her eye like a spark from a flint. ³⁹⁴But when little Mary was there I had never a thought of her, and that I swear as I hope for God's mercy.

³⁹⁵“It had seemed to me sometimes that she liked to be alone with me, or to coax me out for a walk with her, but I had never thought anything of that. ³⁹⁶But one evening my eyes were opened. ³⁹⁷I had come up from the ship and found my wife out, but Sarah at home. ³⁹⁸“Where’s Mary?” I asked. ³⁹⁹“Oh, she has gone to pay some accounts.” ⁴⁰⁰I was impatient and paced up and down the room. ⁴⁰¹“Can’t you be happy for five minutes without Mary, Jim?” says she. ⁴⁰²“It’s a bad compliment to me that you can’t be contented with my society for so short a time.” ⁴⁰³“That’s all right, my lass,” said I, putting out my hand towards her in a kindly way, but she had it in both hers in an instant, and they burned as if they were in a fever. ⁴⁰⁴I looked into her eyes and I read it all there. ⁴⁰⁵There was no need for her to speak, nor for me either. ⁴⁰⁶I frowned and drew my hand away. ⁴⁰⁷Then she stood by my side in silence for a bit, and then put up her hand and patted me on the shoulder. ⁴⁰⁸“Steady old Jim!” said she, and with a kind o’ mocking laugh, she ran out of the room.

⁴⁰⁹“Well, from that time Sarah hated me with her whole heart and soul, and she is a woman who can hate, too. ⁴¹⁰I was a fool to let her go on biding with us—a besotted fool—but I never said a word to Mary, for I knew it would grieve her. ⁴¹¹Things went on much as before, but after a time I began to find that there was a bit of a change in Mary herself. ⁴¹²She had always been so trusting and so innocent, but now she became queer and suspicious, wanting to know where I had been and what I had been doing, and whom my letters were from, and what I had in my pockets, and a thousand such follies. ⁴¹³Day by day she grew queerer and more irritable, and we had ceaseless rows about nothing. ⁴¹⁴I was fairly puzzled by it all. ⁴¹⁵Sarah avoided me now, but she and Mary were just inseparable. ⁴¹⁶I can see now how she was plotting and scheming and poisoning my wife’s mind against me, but I was such a blind beetle that I could not understand it at the time. ⁴¹⁷Then I broke my blue ribbon and began to drink again, but I think I should not have done it if Mary had been the same as ever. ⁴¹⁸She had some reason to be disgusted with me now, and the gap between us began to be wider and wider. ⁴¹⁹And then this Alec Fairbairn chipped in, and things became a thousand times blacker.

⁴²⁰“It was to see Sarah that he came to my house first, but soon it was to see us, for he was a man with winning ways, and he made friends wherever he went. ⁴²¹He was a dashing, swaggering chap, smart and curled, who had seen half the world and could talk of what he had seen. ⁴²²He was good company, I won’t deny it, and he had wonderful polite ways with him for a sailor man, so that I think there must have been a time when he knew more of the poop than the forecastle. ⁴²³For a month he was in and out of my house, and never once did it cross my mind that harm might come of his soft, tricky ways. ⁴²⁴And then at last something made me suspect, and from that day my peace was gone forever.

⁴²⁵“It was only a little thing, too. ⁴²⁶I had come into the parlour unexpected, and as I walked in at the door I saw a light of welcome on my wife’s face. ⁴²⁷But as she saw who it was it faded again, and she turned away with a look of disappointment. ⁴²⁸That was enough for me. ⁴²⁹There was no one but Alec Fairbairn whose step she could have mistaken for mine. ⁴³⁰If I could have seen him then I should have killed him, for I have always been like a madman when my temper gets loose. ⁴³¹Mary saw the devil’s light in my eyes, and she ran forward with her hands on my sleeve. ⁴³²“Don’t, Jim, don’t!” says she. ⁴³³“Where’s Sarah?” I asked. ⁴³⁴“In the kitchen,” says she. ⁴³⁵“Sarah,” says I as I went in, “this man Fairbairn is never to darken my door again.” ⁴³⁶“Why not?” says she. ⁴³⁷“Because I order it.” ⁴³⁸“Oh!” says she, “if my friends are not good enough for this house, then I am not good enough for it either.” ⁴³⁹“You can do what you like,” says I, “but if Fairbairn shows his face here again I’ll send you one of his ears for a keepsake.” ⁴⁴⁰She was frightened by my face, I think, for she never answered a word, and the same evening she left my house.

⁴⁴¹“Well, I don’t know now whether it was pure devilry on the part of this woman, or whether she thought that she could turn me against my wife by encouraging her to misbehave. ⁴⁴²Anyway, she took a house just two streets off and let lodgings to sailors. ⁴⁴³Fairbairn used to stay there, and Mary would go round to have tea with her sister and him. ⁴⁴⁴How often she went I don’t know, but I followed her one day, and as I broke in at the door Fairbairn got away over the back garden wall, like the cowardly

skunk that he was. ⁴⁴⁵I swore to my wife that I would kill her if I found her in his company again, and I led her back with me, sobbing and trembling, and as white as a piece of paper. ⁴⁴⁶There was no trace of love between us any longer. ⁴⁴⁷I could see that she hated me and feared me, and when the thought of it drove me to drink, then she despised me as well.

⁴⁴⁸“Well, Sarah found that she could not make a living in Liverpool, so she went back, as I understand, to live with her sister in Croydon, and things jogged on much the same as ever at home. ⁴⁴⁹And then came this week and all the misery and ruin.

⁴⁵⁰“It was in this way. ⁴⁵¹We had gone on the May Day for a round voyage of seven days, but a hogshead got loose and started one of our plates, so that we had to put back into port for twelve hours. ⁴⁵²I left the ship and came home, thinking what a surprise it would be for my wife, and hoping that maybe she would be glad to see me so soon. ⁴⁵³The thought was in my head as I turned into my own street, and at that moment a cab passed me, and there she was, sitting by the side of Fairbairn, the two chatting and laughing, with never a thought for me as I stood watching them from the footpath.

⁴⁵⁴“I tell you, and I give you my word for it, that from that moment I was not my own master, and it is all like a dim dream when I look back on it. ⁴⁵⁵I had been drinking hard of late, and the two things together fairly turned my brain. ⁴⁵⁶There's something throbbing in my head now, like a docker's hammer, but that morning I seemed to have all Niagara whizzing and buzzing in my ears.

⁴⁵⁷“Well, I took to my heels, and I ran after the cab. I had a heavy oak stick in my hand, and I tell you I saw red from the first; but as I ran I got cunning, too, and hung back a little to see them without being seen. ⁴⁵⁸They pulled up soon at the railway station. ⁴⁵⁹There was a good crowd round the booking-office, so I got quite close to them without being seen. ⁴⁶⁰They took tickets for New Brighton. ⁴⁶¹So did I, but I got in three carriages behind them. ⁴⁶²When we reached it they walked along the Parade, and I was never more than a hundred yards from them. ⁴⁶³At last I saw them hire a boat and start for a row, for it was a very hot day, and they thought, no doubt, that it would be cooler on the water.

⁴⁶⁴“It was just as if they had been given into my hands. ⁴⁶⁵There was a bit of a haze, and you could not see more than a few hundred yards. ⁴⁶⁶I hired a boat for myself, and I pulled after them. ⁴⁶⁷I could see the blur of their craft, but they were going nearly as fast as I, and they must have been a long mile from the shore before I caught them up. ⁴⁶⁸The haze was like a curtain all round us, and there were we three in the middle of it. ⁴⁶⁹My God, shall I ever forget their faces when they saw who was in the boat that was closing in upon them? ⁴⁷⁰She screamed out. ⁴⁷¹He swore like a madman and jabbed at me with an oar, for he must have seen death in my eyes. ⁴⁷²I got past it and got one in with my stick that crushed his head like an egg. ⁴⁷³I would have spared her, perhaps, for all my madness, but she threw her arms round him, crying out to him, and calling him “Alec.” ⁴⁷⁴I struck again, and she lay stretched beside him. ⁴⁷⁵I was like a wild beast then that had tasted blood. ⁴⁷⁶If Sarah had been there, by the Lord, she should have joined them. ⁴⁷⁷I pulled out my knife, and—well, there! ⁴⁷⁸I've said enough. ⁴⁷⁹It gave me a kind of savage joy when I thought how Sarah would feel when she had such signs as these of what her meddling had brought about. ⁴⁸⁰Then I tied the bodies into the boat, stove a plank, and stood by until they had sunk. ⁴⁸¹I knew very well that the owner would think that they had lost their bearings in the haze, and had drifted off out to sea. ⁴⁸²I cleaned myself up, got back to land, and joined my ship without a soul having a suspicion of what had passed. ⁴⁸³That night I made up the packet for Sarah Cushing, and next day I sent it from Belfast.

⁴⁸⁴“There you have the whole truth of it. ⁴⁸⁵You can hang me, or do what you like with me, but you cannot punish me as I have been punished already. ⁴⁸⁶I cannot shut my eyes but I see those two faces staring at me—staring at me as they stared when my boat broke through the haze. ⁴⁸⁷I killed them quick, but they are killing me slow; and if I have another night of it I shall be either mad or dead before morning. ⁴⁸⁸You won't put me alone into a cell, sir? ⁴⁸⁹For pity's sake don't, and may you be treated in your day of agony as you treat me now.’

⁴⁹⁰“What is the meaning of it, Watson?” said Holmes solemnly as he laid down the paper. ⁴⁹¹“What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? ⁴⁹²It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. ⁴⁹³But what end? ⁴⁹⁴There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever.”

The Yellow Face

¹[In publishing these short sketches based upon the numerous cases in which my companion's singular gifts have made us the listeners to, and eventually the actors in, some strange drama, it is only natural that I should dwell rather upon his successes than upon his failures. ²And this not so much for the sake of his reputations—for, indeed, it was when he was at his wits' end that his energy and his versatility were most admirable—but because where he failed it happened too often that no one else succeeded, and that the tale was left forever without a conclusion. ³Now and again, however, it chanced that even when he erred, the truth was still discovered. ⁴I have noted of some half-dozen cases of the kind of which “The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual” and that which I am about to recount are the two which present the strongest features of interest.]

⁵Sherlock Holmes was a man who seldom took exercise for exercise's sake. ⁶Few men were capable of greater muscular effort, and he was undoubtedly one of the finest boxers of his weight that I have ever seen; but he looked upon aimless bodily exertion as a waste of energy, and he seldom bestirred himself save when there was some professional object to be served. ⁷Then he was absolutely untiring and indefatigable. ⁸That he should have kept himself in training under such circumstances is remarkable, but his diet was usually of the sparest, and his habits were simple to the verge of austerity. ⁹Save for the occasional use of cocaine, he had no vices, and he only turned to the drug as a protest against the monotony of existence when cases were scanty and the papers uninteresting.

¹⁰One day in early spring he had so far relaxed as to go for a walk with me in the Park, where the first faint shoots of green were breaking out upon the elms, and the sticky spear-heads of the chestnuts were just beginning to burst into their five-fold leaves. ¹¹For two hours we rambled about together, in silence for the most part, as befits two men who know each other intimately. ¹²It was nearly five before we were back in Baker Street once more.

¹³“Beg pardon, sir,” said our page-boy, as he opened the door. ¹⁴“There's been a gentleman here asking for you, sir.”

¹⁵Holmes glanced reproachfully at me. ¹⁶“So much for afternoon walks!” said he. ¹⁷“Has this gentleman gone, then?”

¹⁸“Yes, sir.”

¹⁹“Didn't you ask him in?”

²⁰“Yes, sir; he came in.”

²¹“How long did he wait?”

²²“Half an hour, sir. ²³He was a very restless gentleman, sir, a-walkin' and a-stampin' all the time he was here. ²⁴I was waitin' outside the door, sir, and I could hear him. ²⁵At last he outs into the passage, and he cries, ‘Is that man never goin' to come?’ ²⁶Those were his very words, sir. ²⁷‘You'll only need to wait a little longer,’ says I. ²⁸‘Then I'll wait in the open air, for I feel half choked,’ says he. ²⁹‘I'll be back before long.’ ³⁰And with that he ups and he outs, and all I could say wouldn't hold him back.”

³¹“Well, well, you did your best,” said Holmes, as we walked into our room. ³²“It's very annoying, though, Watson. ³³I was badly in need of a case, and this looks, from the man's impatience, as if it were of importance. ³⁴Hullo! That's not your pipe on the table. ³⁵He must have left his behind him. ³⁶A nice old brier with a good long stem of what the tobacconists call amber. ³⁷I wonder how many real amber mouthpieces there are in London? ³⁸Some people think that a fly in it is a sign. ³⁹Well, he must have been disturbed in his mind to leave a pipe behind him which he evidently values highly.”

⁴⁰“How do you know that he values it highly?” I asked.

⁴¹“Well, I should put the original cost of the pipe at seven and sixpence. ⁴²Now it has, you see, been twice mended, once in the wooden stem and once in the amber. ⁴³Each of these mends, done, as you observe, with silver bands, must have cost more than the pipe did originally. ⁴⁴The man must value the pipe highly when he prefers to patch it up rather than buy a new one with the same money.”

⁴⁵“Anything else?” I asked, for Holmes was turning the pipe about in his hand, and staring at it in his peculiar pensive way.

⁴⁶He held it up and tapped on it with his long, thin fore-finger, as a professor might who was lecturing on a bone.

⁴⁷“Pipes are occasionally of extraordinary interest,” said he. ⁴⁸“Nothing has more individuality, save perhaps watches and bootlaces. ⁴⁹The indications here, however, are neither very marked nor very important. ⁵⁰The owner is obviously a muscular man, left-handed, with an excellent set of teeth, careless in his habits, and with no need to practise economy.”

⁵¹My friend threw out the information in a very offhand way, but I saw that he cocked his eye at me to see if I had followed his reasoning.

⁵²“You think a man must be well-to-do if he smokes a seven-shilling pipe,” said I.

⁵³“This is Grosvenor mixture at eightpence an ounce,” Holmes answered, knocking a little out on his palm. ⁵⁴“As he might get an excellent smoke for half the price, he has no need to practise economy.”

⁵⁵“And the other points?”

⁵⁶“He has been in the habit of lighting his pipe at lamps and gas-jets. ⁵⁷You can see that it is quite charred all down one side. ⁵⁸Of course a match could not have done that. ⁵⁹Why should a man hold a match to the side of his pipe? ⁶⁰But you cannot light it at a lamp without getting the bowl charred. ⁶¹And it is all on the right side of the pipe. ⁶²From that I gather that he is a left-handed man. ⁶³You hold your own pipe to the lamp, and see how naturally you, being right-handed, hold the left side to the flame. ⁶⁴You might do it once the other way, but not as a constancy. ⁶⁵This has always been held so. ⁶⁶Then he has bitten through his amber. ⁶⁷It takes a muscular, energetic fellow, and one with a good set of teeth, to do that. ⁶⁸But if I am not mistaken I hear him upon the stair, so we shall have something more interesting than his pipe to study.”

⁶⁹An instant later our door opened, and a tall young man entered the room. ⁷⁰He was well but quietly dressed in a dark-gray suit, and carried a brown wide-awake in his hand. ⁷¹I should have put him at about thirty, though he was really some years older.

⁷²“I beg your pardon,” said he, with some embarrassment; “I suppose I should have knocked. ⁷³Yes, of course I should have knocked. ⁷⁴The fact is that I am a little upset, and you must put it all down to that.”

⁷⁵He passed his hand over his forehead like a man who is half dazed, and then fell rather than sat down upon a chair.

⁷⁶“I can see that you have not slept for a night or two,” said Holmes, in his easy, genial way. ⁷⁷“That tries a man's nerves more than work, and more even than pleasure. ⁷⁸May I ask how I can help you?”

⁷⁹“I wanted your advice, sir. ⁸⁰I don't know what to do and my whole life seems to have gone to pieces.”

⁸¹“You wish to employ me as a consulting detective?”

⁸²“Not that only. ⁸³I want your opinion as a judicious man—as a man of the world. ⁸⁴I want to know what I ought to do next. ⁸⁵I hope to God you'll be able to tell me.”

⁸⁶He spoke in little, sharp, jerky outbursts, and it seemed to me that to speak at all was very painful to him, and that his will all through was overriding his inclinations.

⁸⁷"It's a very delicate thing," said he. ⁸⁸"One does not like to speak of one's domestic affairs to strangers.

⁸⁹It seems dreadful to discuss the conduct of one's wife with two men whom I have never seen before.

⁹⁰It's horrible to have to do it. ⁹¹But I've got to the end of my tether, and I must have advice."

⁹²"My dear Mr. Grant Munro—" began Holmes.

⁹³Our visitor sprang from his chair. ⁹⁴"What!" he cried, "you know my name?"

⁹⁵"If you wish to preserve your incognito," said Holmes, smiling, "I would suggest that you cease to write your name upon the lining of your hat, or else that you turn the crown towards the person whom you are addressing. ⁹⁶I was about to say that my friend and I have listened to a good many strange secrets in this room, and that we have had the good fortune to bring peace to many troubled souls. ⁹⁷I trust that we may do as much for you. ⁹⁸Might I beg you, as time may prove to be of importance, to furnish me with the facts of your case without further delay?"

⁹⁹Our visitor again passed his hand over his forehead, as if he found it bitterly hard. ¹⁰⁰From every gesture and expression I could see that he was a reserved, self-contained man, with a dash of pride in his nature, more likely to hide his wounds than to expose them. ¹⁰¹Then suddenly, with a fierce gesture of his closed hand, like one who throws reserve to the winds, he began.

¹⁰²"The facts are these, Mr. Holmes," said he. ¹⁰³"I am a married man, and have been so for three years.

¹⁰⁴During that time my wife and I have loved each other as fondly and lived as happily as any two that ever were joined. ¹⁰⁵We have not had a difference, not one, in thought or word or deed. ¹⁰⁶And now, since last Monday, there has suddenly sprung up a barrier between us, and I find that there is something in her life and in her thought of which I know as little as if she were the woman who brushes by me in the street. ¹⁰⁷We are estranged, and I want to know why.

¹⁰⁸"Now there is one thing that I want to impress upon you before I go any further, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁰⁹Effie loves me. ¹¹⁰Don't let there be any mistake about that. ¹¹¹She loves me with her whole heart and soul, and never more than now. ¹¹²I know it. ¹¹³I feel it. ¹¹⁴I don't want to argue about that. ¹¹⁵A man can tell easily enough when a woman loves him. ¹¹⁶But there's this secret between us, and we can never be the same until it is cleared."

¹¹⁷"Kindly let me have the facts, Mr. Munro," said Holmes, with some impatience.

¹¹⁸"I'll tell you what I know about Effie's history. ¹¹⁹She was a widow when I met her first, though quite young—only twenty-five. ¹²⁰Her name then was Mrs. Hebron. ¹²¹She went out to America when she was young, and lived in the town of Atlanta, where she married this Hebron, who was a lawyer with a good practice. ¹²²They had one child, but the yellow fever broke out badly in the place, and both husband and child died of it. ¹²³I have seen his death certificate. ¹²⁴This sickened her of America, and she came back to live with a maiden aunt at Pinner, in Middlesex. ¹²⁵I may mention that her husband had left her comfortably off, and that she had a capital of about four thousand five hundred pounds, which had been so well invested by him that it returned an average of seven per cent. ¹²⁶She had only been six months at Pinner when I met her; we fell in love with each other, and we married a few weeks afterwards.

¹²⁷"I am a hop merchant myself, and as I have an income of seven or eight hundred, we found ourselves comfortably off, and took a nice eighty-pound-a-year villa at Norbury. ¹²⁸Our little place was very countrified, considering that it is so close to town. ¹²⁹We had an inn and two houses a little above us, and a single cottage at the other side of the field which faces us, and except those there were no houses until you got half way to the station. ¹³⁰My business took me into town at certain seasons, but in summer I had less to do, and then in our country home my wife and I were just as happy as could be wished. ¹³¹I tell you that there never was a shadow between us until this accursed affair began.

¹³²“There's one thing I ought to tell you before I go further. ¹³³When we married, my wife made over all her property to me—rather against my will, for I saw how awkward it would be if my business affairs went wrong. ¹³⁴However, she would have it so, and it was done. ¹³⁵Well, about six weeks ago she came to me.

¹³⁶“‘Jack,’ said she, ‘when you took my money you said that if ever I wanted any I was to ask you for it.’

¹³⁷“‘Certainly,’ said I. ¹³⁸‘It's all your own.’

¹³⁹“‘Well,’ said she, ‘I want a hundred pounds.’

¹⁴⁰“I was a bit staggered at this, for I had imagined it was simply a new dress or something of the kind that she was after.

¹⁴¹“‘What on earth for?’ I asked.

¹⁴²“‘Oh,’ said she, in her playful way, ‘you said that you were only my banker, and bankers never ask questions, you know.’

¹⁴³“‘If you really mean it, of course you shall have the money,’ said I.

¹⁴⁴“‘Oh, yes, I really mean it.’

¹⁴⁵“‘And you won't tell me what you want it for?’

¹⁴⁶“‘Some day, perhaps, but not just at present, Jack.’

¹⁴⁷“So I had to be content with that, though it was the first time that there had ever been any secret between us. ¹⁴⁸I gave her a check, and I never thought any more of the matter. ¹⁴⁹It may have nothing to do with what came afterwards, but I thought it only right to mention it.

¹⁵⁰“Well, I told you just now that there is a cottage not far from our house. ¹⁵¹There is just a field between us, but to reach it you have to go along the road and then turn down a lane. ¹⁵²Just beyond it is a nice little grove of Scotch firs, and I used to be very fond of strolling down there, for trees are always a neighborly kind of things. ¹⁵³The cottage had been standing empty this eight months, and it was a pity, for it was a pretty two storied place, with an old-fashioned porch and honeysuckle about it. ¹⁵⁴I have stood many a time and thought what a neat little homestead it would make.

¹⁵⁵“Well, last Monday evening I was taking a stroll down that way, when I met an empty van coming up the lane, and saw a pile of carpets and things lying about on the grass-plot beside the porch. ¹⁵⁶It was clear that the cottage had at last been let. ¹⁵⁷I walked past it, and wondered what sort of folk they were who had come to live so near us. ¹⁵⁸And as I looked I suddenly became aware that a face was watching me out of one of the upper windows.

¹⁵⁹“I don't know what there was about that face, Mr. Holmes, but it seemed to send a chill right down my back. ¹⁶⁰I was some little way off, so that I could not make out the features, but there was something unnatural and inhuman about the face. ¹⁶¹That was the impression that I had, and I moved quickly forwards to get a nearer view of the person who was watching me. ¹⁶²But as I did so the face suddenly disappeared, so suddenly that it seemed to have been plucked away into the darkness of the room. ¹⁶³I stood for five minutes thinking the business over, and trying to analyze my impressions. ¹⁶⁴I could not tell if the face were that of a man or a woman. ¹⁶⁵It had been too far from me for that. ¹⁶⁶But its color was what had impressed me most. ¹⁶⁷It was of a livid chalky white, and with something set and rigid about it which was shockingly unnatural. ¹⁶⁸So disturbed was I that I determined to see a little more of the new inmates of the cottage. ¹⁶⁹I approached and knocked at the door, which was instantly opened by a tall, gaunt woman with a harsh, forbidding face.

¹⁷⁰“‘What may you be wantin’?’ she asked, in a Northern accent.

¹⁷¹“‘I am your neighbor over yonder,’ said I, nodding towards my house. ¹⁷²‘I see that you have only just moved in, so I thought that if I could be of any help to you in any—’

¹⁷³“‘Ay, we’ll just ask ye when we want ye,’ said she, and shut the door in my face. ¹⁷⁴‘Annoyed at the churlish rebuff, I turned my back and walked home. ¹⁷⁵‘All evening, though I tried to think of other things, my mind would still turn to the apparition at the window and the rudeness of the woman. ¹⁷⁶‘I determined to say nothing about the former to my wife, for she is a nervous, highly strung woman, and I had no wish that she would share the unpleasant impression which had been produced upon myself. ¹⁷⁷‘I remarked to her, however, before I fell asleep, that the cottage was now occupied, to which she returned no reply.

¹⁷⁸“‘I am usually an extremely sound sleeper. ¹⁷⁹‘It has been a standing jest in the family that nothing could ever wake me during the night. ¹⁸⁰‘And yet somehow on that particular night, whether it may have been the slight excitement produced by my little adventure or not I know not, but I slept much more lightly than usual. ¹⁸¹‘Half in my dreams I was dimly conscious that something was going on in the room, and gradually became aware that my wife had dressed herself and was slipping on her mantle and her bonnet. ¹⁸²‘My lips were parted to murmur out some sleepy words of surprise or remonstrance at this untimely preparation, when suddenly my half-opened eyes fell upon her face, illuminated by the candle-light, and astonishment held me dumb. ¹⁸³‘She wore an expression such as I had never seen before—such as I should have thought her incapable of assuming. ¹⁸⁴‘She was deadly pale and breathing fast, glancing furtively towards the bed as she fastened her mantle, to see if she had disturbed me. ¹⁸⁵‘Then, thinking that I was still asleep, she slipped noiselessly from the room, and an instant later I heard a sharp creaking which could only come from the hinges of the front door. ¹⁸⁶‘I sat up in bed and rapped my knuckles against the rail to make certain that I was truly awake. ¹⁸⁷‘Then I took my watch from under the pillow. ¹⁸⁸‘It was three in the morning. ¹⁸⁹‘What on this earth could my wife be doing out on the country road at three in the morning?

¹⁹⁰“‘I had sat for about twenty minutes turning the thing over in my mind and trying to find some possible explanation. ¹⁹¹‘The more I thought, the more extraordinary and inexplicable did it appear. ¹⁹²‘I was still puzzling over it when I heard the door gently close again, and her footsteps coming up the stairs.

¹⁹³“‘Where in the world have you been, Effie?’ I asked as she entered.

¹⁹⁴“‘She gave a violent start and a kind of gasping cry when I spoke, and that cry and start troubled me more than all the rest, for there was something indescribably guilty about them. ¹⁹⁵‘My wife had always been a woman of a frank, open nature, and it gave me a chill to see her slinking into her own room, and crying out and wincing when her own husband spoke to her.

¹⁹⁶“‘You awake, Jack!’ she cried, with a nervous laugh. ¹⁹⁷‘Why, I thought that nothing could awake you.’

¹⁹⁸“‘Where have you been?’ I asked, more sternly.

¹⁹⁹“‘I don’t wonder that you are surprised,’ said she, and I could see that her fingers were trembling as she undid the fastenings of her mantle. ²⁰⁰‘Why, I never remember having done such a thing in my life before. ²⁰¹‘The fact is that I felt as though I were choking, and had a perfect longing for a breath of fresh air. ²⁰²‘I really think that I should have fainted if I had not gone out. ²⁰³‘I stood at the door for a few minutes, and now I am quite myself again.’

²⁰⁴“‘All the time that she was telling me this story she never once looked in my direction, and her voice was quite unlike her usual tones. ²⁰⁵‘It was evident to me that she was saying what was false. ²⁰⁶‘I said nothing in reply, but turned my face to the wall, sick at heart, with my mind filled with a thousand venomous doubts and suspicions. ²⁰⁷‘What was it that my wife was concealing from me? ²⁰⁸‘Where had

she been during that strange expedition? ²⁰⁹I felt that I should have no peace until I knew, and yet I shrank from asking her again after once she had told me what was false. ²¹⁰All the rest of the night I tossed and tumbled, framing theory after theory, each more unlikely than the last.

²¹¹“I should have gone to the City that day, but I was too disturbed in my mind to be able to pay attention to business matters. ²¹²My wife seemed to be as upset as myself, and I could see from the little questioning glances which she kept shooting at me that she understood that I disbelieved her statement, and that she was at her wits' end what to do. ²¹³We hardly exchanged a word during breakfast, and immediately afterwards I went out for a walk, that I might think the matter out in the fresh morning air.

²¹⁴“I went as far as the Crystal Palace, spent an hour in the grounds, and was back in Norbury by one o'clock. ²¹⁵It happened that my way took me past the cottage, and I stopped for an instant to look at the windows, and to see if I could catch a glimpse of the strange face which had looked out at me on the day before. ²¹⁶As I stood there, imagine my surprise, Mr. Holmes, when the door suddenly opened and my wife walked out.

²¹⁷“I was struck dumb with astonishment at the sight of her; but my emotions were nothing to those which showed themselves upon her face when our eyes met. ²¹⁸She seemed for an instant to wish to shrink back inside the house again; and then, seeing how useless all concealment must be, she came forward, with a very white face and frightened eyes which belied the smile upon her lips.

²¹⁹““Ah, Jack,” she said, ‘I have just been in to see if I can be of any assistance to our new neighbors.

²²⁰Why do you look at me like that, Jack? ²²¹You are not angry with me?’

²²²““So,” said I, ‘this is where you went during the night.’

²²³““What do you mean?” she cried.

²²⁴““You came here. ²²⁵I am sure of it. ²²⁶Who are these people, that you should visit them at such an hour?’

²²⁷““I have not been here before.’

²²⁸““How can you tell me what you know is false?” I cried. ²²⁹Your very voice changes as you speak.

²³⁰When have I ever had a secret from you? ²³¹I shall enter that cottage, and I shall probe the matter to the bottom.’

²³²““No, no, Jack, for God's sake!” she gasped, in uncontrollable emotion. ²³³Then, as I approached the door, she seized my sleeve and pulled me back with convulsive strength.

²³⁴““I implore you not to do this, Jack,” she cried. ²³⁵I swear that I will tell you everything some day, but nothing but misery can come of it if you enter that cottage.’ ²³⁶Then, as I tried to shake her off, she clung to me in a frenzy of entreaty.

²³⁷““Trust me, Jack!” she cried. ²³⁸Trust me only this once. ²³⁹You will never have cause to regret it.

²⁴⁰You know that I would not have a secret from you if it were not for your own sake. ²⁴¹Our whole lives are at stake in this. ²⁴²If you come home with me, all will be well. ²⁴³If you force your way into that cottage, all is over between us.’

²⁴⁴“There was such earnestness, such despair, in her manner that her words arrested me, and I stood irresolute before the door.

²⁴⁵““I will trust you on one condition, and on one condition only,” said I at last. ²⁴⁶It is that this mystery comes to an end from now. ²⁴⁷You are at liberty to preserve your secret, but you must promise me that there shall be no more nightly visits, no more doings which are kept from my knowledge. ²⁴⁸I am willing to forget those which are passed if you will promise that there shall be no more in the future.’

²⁴⁹“‘I was sure that you would trust me,’ she cried, with a great sigh of relief. ²⁵⁰‘It shall be just as you wish. ²⁵¹Come away—oh, come away up to the house.’

²⁵²“Still pulling at my sleeve, she led me away from the cottage. ²⁵³As we went I glanced back, and there was that yellow livid face watching us out of the upper window. ²⁵⁴What link could there be between that creature and my wife? ²⁵⁵Or how could the coarse, rough woman whom I had seen the day before be connected with her? ²⁵⁶It was a strange puzzle, and yet I knew that my mind could never know ease again until I had solved it.

²⁵⁷“For two days after this I stayed at home, and my wife appeared to abide loyally by our engagement, for, as far as I know, she never stirred out of the house. ²⁵⁸On the third day, however, I had ample evidence that her solemn promise was not enough to hold her back from this secret influence which drew her away from her husband and her duty.

²⁵⁹“I had gone into town on that day, but I returned by the 2.40 instead of the 3.36, which is my usual train. ²⁶⁰As I entered the house the maid ran into the hall with a startled face.

²⁶¹“‘Where is your mistress?’ I asked.

²⁶²“‘I think that she has gone out for a walk,’ she answered.

²⁶³“My mind was instantly filled with suspicion. ²⁶⁴I rushed upstairs to make sure that she was not in the house. ²⁶⁵As I did so I happened to glance out of one of the upper windows, and saw the maid with whom I had just been speaking running across the field in the direction of the cottage. ²⁶⁶Then of course I saw exactly what it all meant. ²⁶⁷My wife had gone over there, and had asked the servant to call her if I should return. ²⁶⁸Tingling with anger, I rushed down and hurried across, determined to end the matter once and forever. ²⁶⁹I saw my wife and the maid hurrying back along the lane, but I did not stop to speak with them. ²⁷⁰In the cottage lay the secret which was casting a shadow over my life. ²⁷¹I vowed that, come what might, it should be a secret no longer. ²⁷²I did not even knock when I reached it, but turned the handle and rushed into the passage.

²⁷³“It was all still and quiet upon the ground floor. ²⁷⁴In the kitchen a kettle was singing on the fire, and a large black cat lay coiled up in the basket; but there was no sign of the woman whom I had seen before. ²⁷⁵I ran into the other room, but it was equally deserted. ²⁷⁶Then I rushed up the stairs, only to find two other rooms empty and deserted at the top. ²⁷⁷There was no one at all in the whole house. ²⁷⁸The furniture and pictures were of the most common and vulgar description, save in the one chamber at the window of which I had seen the strange face. ²⁷⁹That was comfortable and elegant, and all my suspicions rose into a fierce bitter flame when I saw that on the mantelpiece stood a copy of a full-length photograph of my wife, which had been taken at my request only three months ago.

²⁸⁰“I stayed long enough to make certain that the house was absolutely empty. ²⁸¹Then I left it, feeling a weight at my heart such as I had never had before. ²⁸²My wife came out into the hall as I entered my house; but I was too hurt and angry to speak with her, and pushing past her, I made my way into my study. ²⁸³She followed me, however, before I could close the door.

²⁸⁴“‘I am sorry that I broke my promise, Jack,’ said she; ‘but if you knew all the circumstances I am sure that you would forgive me.’

²⁸⁵“‘Tell me everything, then,’ said I.

²⁸⁶“‘I cannot, Jack, I cannot,’ she cried.

²⁸⁷“‘Until you tell me who it is that has been living in that cottage, and who it is to whom you have given that photograph, there can never be any confidence between us,’ said I, and breaking away from her, I left the house. ²⁸⁸That was yesterday, Mr. Holmes, and I have not seen her since, nor do I know anything more about this strange business. ²⁸⁹It is the first shadow that has come between us, and it has

so shaken me that I do not know what I should do for the best. ²⁹⁰Suddenly this morning it occurred to me that you were the man to advise me, so I have hurried to you now, and I place myself unreservedly in your hands. ²⁹¹If there is any point which I have not made clear, pray question me about it. ²⁹²But, above all, tell me quickly what I am to do, for this misery is more than I can bear."

²⁹³Holmes and I had listened with the utmost interest to this extraordinary statement, which had been delivered in the jerky, broken fashion of a man who is under the influence of extreme emotions. ²⁹⁴My companion sat silent for some time, with his chin upon his hand, lost in thought.

²⁹⁵"Tell me," said he at last, "could you swear that this was a man's face which you saw at the window?"

²⁹⁶"Each time that I saw it I was some distance away from it, so that it is impossible for me to say."

²⁹⁷"You appear, however, to have been disagreeably impressed by it."

²⁹⁸"It seemed to be of an unnatural color, and to have a strange rigidity about the features. ²⁹⁹When I approached, it vanished with a jerk."

³⁰⁰"How long is it since your wife asked you for a hundred pounds?"

³⁰¹"Nearly two months."

³⁰²"Have you ever seen a photograph of her first husband?"

³⁰³"No; there was a great fire at Atlanta very shortly after his death, and all her papers were destroyed."

³⁰⁴"And yet she had a certificate of death. ³⁰⁵You say that you saw it."

³⁰⁶"Yes; she got a duplicate after the fire."

³⁰⁷"Did you ever meet any one who knew her in America?"

³⁰⁸"No."

³⁰⁹"Did she ever talk of revisiting the place?"

³¹⁰"No."

³¹¹"Or get letters from it?"

³¹²"No."

³¹³"Thank you. ³¹⁴I should like to think over the matter a little now. ³¹⁵If the cottage is now permanently deserted we may have some difficulty. ³¹⁶If, on the other hand, as I fancy is more likely, the inmates were warned of your coming, and left before you entered yesterday, then they may be back now, and we should clear it all up easily. ³¹⁷Let me advise you, then, to return to Norbury, and to examine the windows of the cottage again. ³¹⁸If you have reason to believe that is inhabited, do not force your way in, but send a wire to my friend and me. ³¹⁹We shall be with you within an hour of receiving it, and we shall then very soon get to the bottom of the business."

³²⁰"And if it is still empty?"

³²¹"In that case I shall come out to-morrow and talk it over with you. ³²²Good-bye, and, above all, do not fret until you know that you really have a cause for it."

³²³"I am afraid that this is a bad business, Watson," said my companion, as he returned after accompanying Mr. Grant Munro to the door. ³²⁴"What do you make of it?"

³²⁵"It had an ugly sound," I answered.

³²⁶“Yes. ³²⁷There's blackmail in it, or I am much mistaken.”

³²⁸“And who is the blackmailer?”

³²⁹“Well, it must be the creature who lives in the only comfortable room in the place, and has her photograph above his fireplace. ³³⁰Upon my word, Watson, there is something very attractive about that livid face at the window, and I would not have missed the case for worlds.”

³³¹“You have a theory?”

³³²“Yes, a provisional one. ³³³But I shall be surprised if it does not turn out to be correct. ³³⁴This woman's first husband is in that cottage.”

³³⁵“Why do you think so?”

³³⁶“How else can we explain her frenzied anxiety that her second one should not enter it? ³³⁷The facts, as I read them, are something like this: This woman was married in America. ³³⁸Her husband developed some hateful qualities; or shall we say that he contracted some loathsome disease, and became a leper or an imbecile? ³³⁹She flies from him at last, returns to England, changes her name, and starts her life, as she thinks, afresh. ³⁴⁰She has been married three years, and believes that her position is quite secure, having shown her husband the death certificate of some man whose name she has assumed, when suddenly her whereabouts is discovered by her first husband; or, we may suppose, by some unscrupulous woman who has attached herself to the invalid. ³⁴¹They write to the wife, and threaten to come and expose her. ³⁴²She asks for a hundred pounds, and endeavors to buy them off. ³⁴³They come in spite of it, and when the husband mentions casually to the wife that there are new-comers in the cottage, she knows in some way that they are her pursuers. ³⁴⁴She waits until her husband is asleep, and then she rushes down to endeavor to persuade them to leave her in peace. ³⁴⁵Having no success, she goes again next morning, and her husband meets her, as he has told us, as she comes out. ³⁴⁶She promises him then not to go there again, but two days afterwards the hope of getting rid of those dreadful neighbors was too strong for her, and she made another attempt, taking down with her the photograph which had probably been demanded from her. ³⁴⁷In the midst of this interview the maid rushed in to say that the master had come home, on which the wife, knowing that he would come straight down to the cottage, hurried the inmates out at the back door, into the grove of fir-trees, probably, which was mentioned as standing near. ³⁴⁸In this way he found the place deserted. ³⁴⁹I shall be very much surprised, however, if it still so when he reconnoitres it this evening. ³⁵⁰What do you think of my theory?”

³⁵¹“It is all surmise.”

³⁵²“But at least it covers all the facts. ³⁵³When new facts come to our knowledge which cannot be covered by it, it will be time enough to reconsider it. ³⁵⁴We can do nothing more until we have a message from our friend at Norbury.”

³⁵⁵But we had not a very long time to wait for that. ³⁵⁶It came just as we had finished our tea.

³⁵⁷“The cottage is still tenanted,” it said. ³⁵⁸“Have seen the face again at the window. ³⁵⁹Will meet the seven o'clock train, and will take no steps until you arrive.”

³⁶⁰He was waiting on the platform when we stepped out, and we could see in the light of the station lamps that he was very pale, and quivering with agitation.

³⁶¹“They are still there, Mr. Holmes,” said he, laying his hand hard upon my friend's sleeve. ³⁶²“I saw lights in the cottage as I came down. ³⁶³We shall settle it now once and for all.”

³⁶⁴“What is your plan, then?” asked Holmes, as he walked down the dark tree-lined road.

³⁶⁵“I am going to force my way in and see for myself who is in the house. ³⁶⁶I wish you both to be there as witnesses.”

³⁶⁷“You are quite determined to do this, in spite of your wife's warning that it is better that you should not solve the mystery?”

³⁶⁸“Yes, I am determined.”

³⁶⁹“Well, I think that you are in the right. ³⁷⁰Any truth is better than indefinite doubt. ³⁷¹We had better go up at once. ³⁷²Of course, legally, we are putting ourselves hopelessly in the wrong; but I think that it is worth it.”

³⁷³It was a very dark night, and a thin rain began to fall as we turned from the high road into a narrow lane, deeply rutted, with hedges on either side. ³⁷⁴Mr. Grant Munro pushed impatiently forward, however, and we stumbled after him as best we could.

³⁷⁵“There are the lights of my house,” he murmured, pointing to a glimmer among the trees. ³⁷⁶“And here is the cottage which I am going to enter.”

³⁷⁷We turned a corner in the lane as he spoke, and there was the building close beside us. ³⁷⁸A yellow bar falling across the black foreground showed that the door was not quite closed, and one window in the upper story was brightly illuminated. ³⁷⁹As we looked, we saw a dark blur moving across the blind.

³⁸⁰“There is that creature!” cried Grant Munro. ³⁸¹“You can see for yourselves that some one is there. ³⁸²Now follow me, and we shall soon know all.”

³⁸³We approached the door; but suddenly a woman appeared out of the shadow and stood in the golden track of the lamp-light. ³⁸⁴I could not see her face in the darkness, but her arms were thrown out in an attitude of entreaty.

³⁸⁵“For God's sake, don't Jack!” she cried. ³⁸⁶“I had a presentiment that you would come this evening. ³⁸⁷Think better of it, dear! ³⁸⁸Trust me again, and you will never have cause to regret it.”

³⁸⁹“I have trusted you too long, Effie,” he cried, sternly. ³⁹⁰“Leave go of me! ³⁹¹I must pass you. ³⁹²My friends and I are going to settle this matter once and forever!” ³⁹³He pushed her to one side, and we followed closely after him. ³⁹⁴As he threw the door open an old woman ran out in front of him and tried to bar his passage, but he thrust her back, and an instant afterwards we were all upon the stairs. ³⁹⁵Grant Munro rushed into the lighted room at the top, and we entered at his heels.

³⁹⁶It was a cosy, well-furnished apartment, with two candles burning upon the table and two upon the mantelpiece. ³⁹⁷In the corner, stooping over a desk, there sat what appeared to be a little girl. ³⁹⁸Her face was turned away as we entered, but we could see that she was dressed in a red frock, and that she had long white gloves on. ³⁹⁹As she whisked round to us, I gave a cry of surprise and horror. ⁴⁰⁰The face which she turned towards us was of the strangest livid tint, and the features were absolutely devoid of any expression. ⁴⁰¹An instant later the mystery was explained. ⁴⁰²Holmes, with a laugh, passed his hand behind the child's ear, a mask peeled off from her countenance, and there was a little coal black negress, with all her white teeth flashing in amusement at our amazed faces. ⁴⁰³I burst out laughing, out of sympathy with her merriment; but Grant Munro stood staring, with his hand clutching his throat.

⁴⁰⁴“My God!” he cried. ⁴⁰⁵“What can be the meaning of this?”

⁴⁰⁶“I will tell you the meaning of it,” cried the lady, sweeping into the room with a proud, set face.

⁴⁰⁷“You have forced me, against my own judgment, to tell you, and now we must both make the best of it. ⁴⁰⁸My husband died at Atlanta. ⁴⁰⁹My child survived.”

⁴¹⁰“Your child?”

⁴¹¹She drew a large silver locket from her bosom. ⁴¹²“You have never seen this open.”

⁴¹³“I understood that it did not open.”

⁴¹⁴She touched a spring, and the front hinged back. ⁴¹⁵There was a portrait within of a man strikingly handsome and intelligent-looking, but bearing unmistakable signs upon his features of his African descent.

⁴¹⁶“That is John Hebron, of Atlanta,” said the lady, “and a nobler man never walked the earth. ⁴¹⁷I cut myself off from my race in order to wed him, but never once while he lived did I for an instant regret it. ⁴¹⁸It was our misfortune that our only child took after his people rather than mine. ⁴¹⁹It is often so in such matches, and little Lucy is darker far than ever her father was. ⁴²⁰But dark or fair, she is my own dear little girlie, and her mother's pet.” ⁴²¹The little creature ran across at the words and nestled up against the lady's dress. ⁴²²“When I left her in America,” she continued, “it was only because her health was weak, and the change might have done her harm. ⁴²³She was given to the care of a faithful Scotch woman who had once been our servant. ⁴²⁴Never for an instant did I dream of disowning her as my child. ⁴²⁵But when chance threw you in my way, Jack, and I learned to love you, I feared to tell you about my child. ⁴²⁶God forgive me, I feared that I should lose you, and I had not the courage to tell you. ⁴²⁷I had to choose between you, and in my weakness I turned away from my own little girl. ⁴²⁸For three years I have kept her existence a secret from you, but I heard from the nurse, and I knew that all was well with her. ⁴²⁹At last, however, there came an overwhelming desire to see the child once more. ⁴³⁰I struggled against it, but in vain. ⁴³¹Though I knew the danger, I determined to have the child over, if it were but for a few weeks. ⁴³²I sent a hundred pounds to the nurse, and I gave her instructions about this cottage, so that she might come as a neighbor, without my appearing to be in any way connected with her. ⁴³³I pushed my precautions so far as to order her to keep the child in the house during the daytime, and to cover up her little face and hands so that even those who might see her at the window should not gossip about there being a black child in the neighborhood. ⁴³⁴If I had been less cautious I might have been more wise, but I was half crazy with fear that you should learn the truth.

⁴³⁵“It was you who told me first that the cottage was occupied. ⁴³⁶I should have waited for the morning, but I could not sleep for excitement, and so at last I slipped out, knowing how difficult it is to awake you. ⁴³⁷But you saw me go, and that was the beginning of my troubles. ⁴³⁸Next day you had my secret at your mercy, but you nobly refrained from pursuing your advantage. ⁴³⁹Three days later, however, the nurse and child only just escaped from the back door as you rushed in at the front one. ⁴⁴⁰And now to-night you at last know all, and I ask you what is to become of us, my child and me?” ⁴⁴¹She clasped her hands and waited for an answer.

⁴⁴²It was a long ten minutes before Grant Munro broke the silence, and when his answer came it was one of which I love to think. ⁴⁴³He lifted the little child, kissed her, and then, still carrying her, he held his other hand out to his wife and turned towards the door.

⁴⁴⁴“We can talk it over more comfortably at home,” said he. ⁴⁴⁵“I am not a very good man, Effie, but I think that I am a better one than you have given me credit for being.”

⁴⁴⁶Holmes and I followed them down the lane, and my friend plucked at my sleeve as we came out.

⁴⁴⁷“I think,” said he, “that we shall be of more use in London than in Norbury.”

⁴⁴⁸Not another word did he say of the case until late that night, when he was turning away, with his lighted candle, for his bedroom.

⁴⁴⁹“Watson,” said he, “if it should ever strike you that I am getting a little over-confident in my powers, or giving less pains to a case than it deserves, kindly whisper ‘Norbury’ in my ear, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you.”

The Stock-Broker's Clerk

¹Shortly after my marriage I had bought a connection in the Paddington district. ²Old Mr. Farquhar, from whom I purchased it, had at one time an excellent general practice; but his age, and an affliction of the nature of St. Vitus's dance from which he suffered, had very much thinned it. ³The public not unnaturally goes on the principle that he who would heal others must himself be whole, and looks askance at the curative powers of the man whose own case is beyond the reach of his drugs. ⁴Thus as my predecessor weakened his practice declined, until when I purchased it from him it had sunk from twelve hundred to little more than three hundred a year. ⁵I had confidence, however, in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever.

⁶For three months after taking over the practice I was kept very closely at work, and saw little of my friend Sherlock Holmes, for I was too busy to visit Baker Street, and he seldom went anywhere himself save upon professional business. ⁷I was surprised, therefore, when, one morning in June, as I sat reading the British Medical Journal after breakfast, I heard a ring at the bell, followed by the high, somewhat strident tones of my old companion's voice.

⁸"Ah, my dear Watson," said he, striding into the room, "I am very delighted to see you! ⁹I trust that Mrs. Watson has entirely recovered from all the little excitements connected with our adventure of the Sign of Four."

¹⁰"Thank you, we are both very well," said I, shaking him warmly by the hand.

¹¹"And I hope, also," he continued, sitting down in the rocking-chair, "that the cares of medical practice have not entirely obliterated the interest which you used to take in our little deductive problems."

¹²"On the contrary," I answered, "it was only last night that I was looking over my old notes, and classifying some of our past results."

¹³"I trust that you don't consider your collection closed."

¹⁴"Not at all. ¹⁵I should wish nothing better than to have some more of such experiences."

¹⁶"To-day, for example?"

¹⁷"Yes, to-day, if you like."

¹⁸"And as far off as Birmingham?"

¹⁹"Certainly, if you wish it."

²⁰"And the practice?"

²¹"I do my neighbor's when he goes. ²²He is always ready to work off the debt."

²³"Ha! ²⁴Nothing could be better," said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking keenly at me from under his half closed lids. ²⁵"I perceive that you have been unwell lately. ²⁶Summer colds are always a little trying."

²⁷"I was confined to the house by a severe chill for three days last week. ²⁸I thought, however, that I had cast off every trace of it."

²⁹"So you have. ³⁰You look remarkably robust."

³¹"How, then, did you know of it?"

³²“My dear fellow, you know my methods.”

³³“You deduced it, then?”

³⁴“Certainly.”

³⁵“And from what?”

³⁶“From your slippers.”

³⁷I glanced down at the new patent leathers which I was wearing. ³⁸“How on earth—” I began, but Holmes answered my question before it was asked.

³⁹“Your slippers are new,” he said. ⁴⁰“You could not have had them more than a few weeks. ⁴¹The soles which you are at this moment presenting to me are slightly scorched. ⁴²For a moment I thought they might have got wet and been burned in the drying. ⁴³But near the instep there is a small circular wafer of paper with the shopman's hieroglyphics upon it. ⁴⁴Damp would of course have removed this. ⁴⁵You had, then, been sitting with our feet outstretched to the fire, which a man would hardly do even in so wet a June as this if he were in his full health.”

⁴⁶Like all Holmes's reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained. ⁴⁷He read the thought upon my features, and his smile had a tinge of bitterness.

⁴⁸“I am afraid that I rather give myself away when I explain,” said he. ⁴⁹“Results without causes are much more impressive. ⁵⁰You are ready to come to Birmingham, then?”

⁵¹“Certainly. ⁵²What is the case?”

⁵³“You shall hear it all in the train. ⁵⁴My client is outside in a four-wheeler. ⁵⁵Can you come at once?”

⁵⁶“In an instant.” ⁵⁷I scribbled a note to my neighbor, rushed upstairs to explain the matter to my wife, and joined Holmes upon the door-step.

⁵⁸“Your neighbor is a doctor,” said he, nodding at the brass plate.

⁵⁹“Yes; he bought a practice as I did.”

⁶⁰“An old-established one?”

⁶¹“Just the same as mine. ⁶²Both have been ever since the houses were built.”

⁶³“Ah! ⁶⁴Then you got hold of the best of the two.”

⁶⁵“I think I did. ⁶⁶But how do you know?”

⁶⁷“By the steps, my boy. ⁶⁸Yours are worn three inches deeper than his. ⁶⁹But this gentleman in the cab is my client, Mr. Hall Pycroft. ⁷⁰Allow me to introduce you to him. ⁷¹Whip your horse up, cabby, for we have only just time to catch our train.”

⁷²The man whom I found myself facing was a well built, fresh-complexioned young fellow, with a frank, honest face and a slight, crisp, yellow mustache. ⁷³He wore a very shiny top hat and a neat suit of sober black, which made him look what he was—a smart young City man, of the class who have been labeled cockneys, but who give us our crack volunteer regiments, and who turn out more fine athletes and sportsmen than any body of men in these islands. ⁷⁴His round, ruddy face was naturally full of cheeriness, but the corners of his mouth seemed to me to be pulled down in a half-comical distress. ⁷⁵It was not, however, until we were all in a first-class carriage and well started upon our journey to Birmingham that I was able to learn what the trouble was which had driven him to Sherlock Holmes.

⁷⁶“We have a clear run here of seventy minutes,” Holmes remarked. ⁷⁷“I want you, Mr. Hall Pycroft, to tell my friend your very interesting experience exactly as you have told it to me, or with more detail if possible. ⁷⁸It will be of use to me to hear the succession of events again. ⁷⁹It is a case, Watson, which may prove to have something in it, or may prove to have nothing, but which, at least, presents those unusual and outré features which are as dear to you as they are to me. ⁸⁰Now, Mr. Pycroft, I shall not interrupt you again.”

⁸¹Our young companion looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.

⁸²“The worst of the story is,” said he, “that I show myself up as such a confounded fool. ⁸³Of course it may work out all right, and I don't see that I could have done otherwise; but if I have lost my crib and get nothing in exchange I shall feel what a soft Johnnie I have been. ⁸⁴I'm not very good at telling a story, Dr. Watson, but it is like this with me:

⁸⁵“I used to have a billet at Coxon & Woodhouse's, of Draper's Gardens, but they were let in early in the spring through the Venezuelan loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper. ⁸⁶I had been with them five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came, but of course we clerks were all turned adrift, the twenty-seven of us. ⁸⁷I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. ⁸⁸I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon's, and I had saved about seventy of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. ⁸⁹I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. ⁹⁰I had worn out my boots paddling up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever.

⁹¹“At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson & Williams's, the great stock-broking firm in Lombard Street. ⁹²I dare say E. C. is not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. ⁹³The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. ⁹⁴I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. ⁹⁵Back came an answer by return, saying that if I would appear next Monday I might take over my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. ⁹⁶No one knows how these things are worked. ⁹⁷Some people say that the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first that comes. ⁹⁸Anyhow it was my innings that time, and I don't ever wish to feel better pleased. ⁹⁹The screw was a pound a week rise, and the duties just about the same as at Coxon's.

¹⁰⁰“And now I come to the queer part of the business. ¹⁰¹I was in diggings out Hampstead way, 17 Potter's Terrace. ¹⁰²Well, I was sitting doing a smoke that very evening after I had been promised the appointment, when up came my landlady with a card which had “Arthur Pinner, Financial Agent,” printed upon it. ¹⁰³I had never heard the name before and could not imagine what he wanted with me; but, of course, I asked her to show him up. ¹⁰⁴In he walked, a middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man, with a touch of the sheeny about his nose. ¹⁰⁵He had a brisk kind of way with him and spoke sharply, like a man who knew the value of time.

¹⁰⁶“Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe?’ said he.

¹⁰⁷“Yes, sir,’ I answered, pushing a chair towards him.

¹⁰⁸“Lately engaged at Coxon & Woodhouse's?’

¹⁰⁹“Yes, sir.’

¹¹⁰“And now on the staff of Mawson's.’

¹¹¹“Quite so.’

¹¹²“Well,” said he, “the fact is that I have heard some really extraordinary stories about your financial ability. ¹¹³You remember Parker, who used to be Coxon's manager? ¹¹⁴He can never say enough about it.”

¹¹⁵“Of course I was pleased to hear this. ¹¹⁶I had always been pretty sharp in the office, but I had never dreamed that I was talked about in the City in this fashion.

¹¹⁷“You have a good memory?” said he.

¹¹⁸“Pretty fair,” I answered, modestly.

¹¹⁹“Have you kept in touch with the market while you have been out of work?” he asked.

¹²⁰“Yes. ¹²¹I read the stock exchange list every morning.”

¹²²“Now that shows real application!” he cried. ¹²³“That is the way to prosper! ¹²⁴You won't mind my testing you, will you? ¹²⁵Let me see. ¹²⁶How are Ayrshires?”

¹²⁷“A hundred and six and a quarter to a hundred and five and seven-eighths.”

¹²⁸“And New Zealand consolidated?”

¹²⁹“A hundred and four.”

¹³⁰“And British Broken Hills?”

¹³¹“Seven to seven-and-six.”

¹³²“Wonderful!” he cried, with his hands up. ¹³³“This quite fits in with all that I had heard. ¹³⁴My boy, my boy, you are very much too good to be a clerk at Mawson's!”

¹³⁵“This outburst rather astonished me, as you can think. ¹³⁶Well,” said I, “other people don't think quite so much of me as you seem to do, Mr. Pinner. ¹³⁷I had a hard enough fight to get this berth, and I am very glad to have it.”

¹³⁸“Pooh, man; you should soar above it. ¹³⁹You are not in your true sphere. ¹⁴⁰Now, I'll tell you how it stands with me. ¹⁴¹What I have to offer is little enough when measured by your ability, but when compared with Mawson's, it's light to dark. ¹⁴²Let me see. ¹⁴³When do you go to Mawson's?”

¹⁴⁴“On Monday.”

¹⁴⁵“Ha, ha! ¹⁴⁶I think I would risk a little sporting flutter that you don't go there at all.”

¹⁴⁷“Not go to Mawson's?”

¹⁴⁸“No, sir. ¹⁴⁹By that day you will be the business manager of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, with a hundred and thirty-four branches in the towns and villages of France, not counting one in Brussels and one in San Remo.”

¹⁵⁰“This took my breath away. ¹⁵¹I never heard of it,” said I.

¹⁵²“Very likely not. ¹⁵³It has been kept very quiet, for the capital was all privately subscribed, and it's too good a thing to let the public into. ¹⁵⁴My brother, Harry Pinner, is promoter, and joins the board after allotment as managing director. ¹⁵⁵He knew I was in the swim down here, and asked me to pick up a good man cheap. ¹⁵⁶A young, pushing man with plenty of snap about him. ¹⁵⁷Parker spoke of you, and that brought me here tonight. ¹⁵⁸We can only offer you a beggarly five hundred to start with.”

¹⁵⁹“Five hundred a year!” I shouted.

¹⁶⁰“Only that at the beginning; but you are to have an overriding commission of one per cent on all business done by your agents, and you may take my word for it that this will come to more than your salary.’

¹⁶¹“But I know nothing about hardware.’

¹⁶²“Tut, my boy; you know about figures.’

¹⁶³“My head buzzed, and I could hardly sit still in my chair. ¹⁶⁴But suddenly a little chill of doubt came upon me.

¹⁶⁵“I must be frank with you,’ said I. ¹⁶⁶Mawson only gives me two hundred, but Mawson is safe.

¹⁶⁷Now, really, I know so little about your company that—’

¹⁶⁸“Ah, smart, smart!’ he cried, in a kind of ecstasy of delight. ¹⁶⁹‘You are the very man for us. ¹⁷⁰You are not to be talked over, and quite right, too. ¹⁷¹Now, here's a note for a hundred pounds, and if you think that we can do business you may just slip it into your pocket as an advance upon your salary.’

¹⁷²“That is very handsome,’ said I. ¹⁷³‘When should I take over my new duties?’

¹⁷⁴“Be in Birmingham to-morrow at one,’ said he. ¹⁷⁵‘I have a note in my pocket here which you will take to my brother. ¹⁷⁶You will find him at 126b Corporation Street, where the temporary offices of the company are situated. ¹⁷⁷Of course he must confirm your engagement, but between ourselves it will be all right.’

¹⁷⁸“Really, I hardly know how to express my gratitude, Mr. Pinner,’ said I.

¹⁷⁹“Not at all, my boy. ¹⁸⁰You have only got your desserts. ¹⁸¹There are one or two small things—mere formalities—which I must arrange with you. ¹⁸²You have a bit of paper beside you there. ¹⁸³Kindly write upon it “I am perfectly willing to act as business manager to the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, at a minimum salary of £500.”’

¹⁸⁴“I did as he asked, and he put the paper in his pocket.

¹⁸⁵“There is one other detail,’ said he. ¹⁸⁶‘What do you intend to do about Mawson's?’

¹⁸⁷“I had forgotten all about Mawson's in my joy. ¹⁸⁸‘I'll write and resign,’ said I.

¹⁸⁹“Precisely what I don't want you to do. ¹⁹⁰I had a row over you with Mawson's manager. ¹⁹¹I had gone up to ask him about you, and he was very offensive; accused me of coaxing you away from the service of the firm, and that sort of thing. ¹⁹²At last I fairly lost my temper. ¹⁹³“If you want good men you should pay them a good price,” said I.

¹⁹⁴““He would rather have our small price than your big one,” said he.

¹⁹⁵““I'll lay you a fiver,” said I, “that when he has my offer you'll never so much as hear from him again.”

¹⁹⁶““Done!” said he. ¹⁹⁷“We picked him out of the gutter, and he won't leave us so easily.” ¹⁹⁸Those were his very words.’

¹⁹⁹“The impudent scoundrel!’ I cried. ²⁰⁰‘I've never so much as seen him in my life. ²⁰¹Why should I consider him in any way? ²⁰²I shall certainly not write if you would rather I didn't.’

²⁰³“Good! ²⁰⁴That's a promise,’ said he, rising from his chair. ²⁰⁵‘Well, I'm delighted to have got so good a man for my brother. ²⁰⁶Here's your advance of a hundred pounds, and here is the letter. ²⁰⁷Make a note of the address, 126b Corporation Street, and remember that one o'clock to-morrow is your appointment. ²⁰⁸Good-night; and may you have all the fortune that you deserve!’

²⁰⁹“That's just about all that passed between us, as near as I can remember. ²¹⁰You can imagine, Dr. Watson, how pleased I was at such an extraordinary bit of good fortune. ²¹¹I sat up half the night hugging myself over it, and next day I was off to Birmingham in a train that would take me in plenty time for my appointment. ²¹²I took my things to a hotel in New Street, and then I made my way to the address which had been given me.

²¹³“It was a quarter of an hour before my time, but I thought that would make no difference. ²¹⁴126b was a passage between two large shops, which led to a winding stone stair, from which there were many flats, let as offices to companies or professional men. ²¹⁵The names of the occupants were painted at the bottom on the wall, but there was no such name as the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited. ²¹⁶I stood for a few minutes with my heart in my boots, wondering whether the whole thing was an elaborate hoax or not, when up came a man and addressed me. ²¹⁷He was very like the chap I had seen the night before, the same figure and voice, but he was clean shaven and his hair was lighter.

²¹⁸“‘Are you Mr. Hall Pycroft?’ he asked.

²¹⁹“‘Yes,’ said I.

²²⁰“‘Oh! ²²¹I was expecting you, but you are a trifle before your time. ²²²I had a note from my brother this morning in which he sang your praises very loudly.’

²²³“‘I was just looking for the offices when you came.’

²²⁴“‘We have not got our name up yet, for we only secured these temporary premises last week. ²²⁵Come up with me, and we will talk the matter over.’

²²⁶“I followed him to the top of a very lofty stair, and there, right under the slates, were a couple of empty, dusty little rooms, uncarpeted and uncurtained, into which he led me. ²²⁷I had thought of a great office with shining tables and rows of clerks, such as I was used to, and I dare say I stared rather straight at the two deal chairs and one little table, which, with a ledger and a waste paper basket, made up the whole furniture.

²²⁸“‘Don't be disheartened, Mr. Pycroft,’ said my new acquaintance, seeing the length of my face. ²²⁹‘Rome was not built in a day, and we have lots of money at our backs, though we don't cut much dash yet in offices. ²³⁰Pray sit down, and let me have your letter.’

²³¹“I gave it to him, and he read it over very carefully.

²³²“‘You seem to have made a vast impression upon my brother Arthur,’ said he; ‘and I know that he is a pretty shrewd judge. ²³³He swears by London, you know; and I by Birmingham; but this time I shall follow his advice. ²³⁴Pray consider yourself definitely engaged.’

²³⁵“‘What are my duties?’ I asked.

²³⁶“‘You will eventually manage the great depot in Paris, which will pour a flood of English crockery into the shops of a hundred and thirty-four agents in France. ²³⁷The purchase will be completed in a week, and meanwhile you will remain in Birmingham and make yourself useful.’

²³⁸“‘How?’

²³⁹“For answer, he took a big red book out of a drawer.

²⁴⁰“‘This is a directory of Paris,’ said he, ‘with the trades after the names of the people. ²⁴¹I want you to take it home with you, and to mark off all the hardware sellers, with their addresses. ²⁴²It would be of the greatest use to me to have them.’

²⁴³“‘Surely there are classified lists?’ I suggested.

²⁴⁴“Not reliable ones. ²⁴⁵Their system is different from ours. ²⁴⁶Stick at it, and let me have the lists by Monday, at twelve. ²⁴⁷Good-day, Mr. Pycroft. ²⁴⁸If you continue to show zeal and intelligence you will find the company a good master.’

²⁴⁹“I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. ²⁵⁰On the one hand, I was definitely engaged and had a hundred pounds in my pocket; on the other, the look of the offices, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. ²⁵¹However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. ²⁵²All Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. ²⁵³I went round to my employer, found him in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. ²⁵⁴On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday—that is, yesterday. ²⁵⁵Then I brought it round to Mr. Harry Pinner.

²⁵⁶“Thank you very much,’ said he; ‘I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. ²⁵⁷This list will be of very material assistance to me.’

²⁵⁸“It took some time,’ said I.

²⁵⁹“And now,’ said he, ‘I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery.’

²⁶⁰“Very good.’

²⁶¹“And you can come up to-morrow evening, at seven, and let me know how you are getting on. ²⁶²Don’t overwork yourself. ²⁶³A couple of hours at Day’s Music Hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labors.’ ²⁶⁴He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed with gold.”

²⁶⁵Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

²⁶⁶“You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way,” said he: “When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson’s, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. ²⁶⁷The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. ²⁶⁸When I put that with the voice and figure being the same, and only those things altered which might be changed by a razor or a wig, I could not doubt that it was the same man. ²⁶⁹Of course you expect two brothers to be alike, but not that they should have the same tooth stuffed in the same way. ²⁷⁰He bowed me out, and I found myself in the street, hardly knowing whether I was on my head or my heels. ²⁷¹Back I went to my hotel, put my head in a basin of cold water, and tried to think it out. ²⁷²Why had he sent me from London to Birmingham? ²⁷³Why had he got there before me? ²⁷⁴And why had he written a letter from himself to himself? ²⁷⁵It was altogether too much for me, and I could make no sense of it. ²⁷⁶And then suddenly it struck me that what was dark to me might be very light to Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ²⁷⁷I had just time to get up to town by the night train to see him this morning, and to bring you both back with me to Birmingham.”

²⁷⁸There was a pause after the stock-broker’s clerk had concluded his surprising experience. ²⁷⁹Then Sherlock Holmes cocked his eye at me, leaning back on the cushions with a pleased and yet critical face, like a connoisseur who has just taken his first sip of a comet vintage.

²⁸⁰“Rather fine, Watson, is it not?” said he. ²⁸¹“There are points in it which please me. ²⁸²I think that you will agree with me that an interview with Mr. Arthur Harry Pinner in the temporary offices of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, would be a rather interesting experience for both of us.”

²⁸³“But how can we do it?” I asked.

²⁸⁴“Oh, easily enough,” said Hall Pycroft, cheerily. ²⁸⁵“You are two friends of mine who are in want of a billet, and what could be more natural than that I should bring you both round to the managing director?”

²⁸⁶“Quite so, of course,” said Holmes. ²⁸⁷“I should like to have a look at the gentleman, and see if I can make anything of his little game. ²⁸⁸What qualities have you, my friend, which would make your services so valuable? ²⁸⁹Or is it possible that—” ²⁹⁰He began biting his nails and staring blankly out of the window, and we hardly drew another word from him until we were in New Street.

²⁹¹At seven o'clock that evening we were walking, the three of us, down Corporation Street to the company's offices.

²⁹²“It is no use our being at all before our time,” said our client. ²⁹³“He only comes there to see me, apparently, for the place is deserted up to the very hour he names.”

²⁹⁴“That is suggestive,” remarked Holmes.

²⁹⁵“By Jove, I told you so!” cried the clerk. ²⁹⁶“That's he walking ahead of us there.”

²⁹⁷He pointed to a smallish, dark, well-dressed man who was bustling along the other side of the road.

²⁹⁸As we watched him he looked across at a boy who was bawling out the latest edition of the evening paper, and running over among the cabs and busses, he bought one from him. ²⁹⁹Then, clutching it in his hand, he vanished through a door-way.

³⁰⁰“There he goes!” cried Hall Pycroft. ³⁰¹“These are the company's offices into which he has gone.

³⁰²Come with me, and I'll fix it up as easily as possible.”

³⁰³Following his lead, we ascended five stories, until we found ourselves outside a half-opened door, at which our client tapped. ³⁰⁴A voice within bade us enter, and we entered a bare, unfurnished room such as Hall Pycroft had described. ³⁰⁵At the single table sat the man whom we had seen in the street, with his evening paper spread out in front of him, and as he looked up at us it seemed to me that I had never looked upon a face which bore such marks of grief, and of something beyond grief—of a horror such as comes to few men in a lifetime. ³⁰⁶His brow glistened with perspiration, his cheeks were of the dull, dead white of a fish's belly, and his eyes were wild and staring. ³⁰⁷He looked at his clerk as though he failed to recognize him, and I could see by the astonishment depicted upon our conductor's face that this was by no means the usual appearance of his employer.

³⁰⁸“You look ill, Mr. Pinner!” he exclaimed.

³⁰⁹“Yes, I am not very well,” answered the other, making obvious efforts to pull himself together, and licking his dry lips before he spoke. ³¹⁰“Who are these gentlemen whom you have brought with you?”

³¹¹“One is Mr. Harris, of Bermondsey, and the other is Mr. Price, of this town,” said our clerk, glibly.

³¹²“They are friends of mine and gentlemen of experience, but they have been out of a place for some little time, and they hoped that perhaps you might find an opening for them in the company's employment.”

³¹³“Very possibly! ³¹⁴Very possibly!” cried Mr. Pinner with a ghastly smile. ³¹⁵“Yes, I have no doubt that we shall be able to do something for you. ³¹⁶What is your particular line, Mr. Harris?”

³¹⁷“I am an accountant,” said Holmes.

³¹⁸“Ah yes, we shall want something of the sort. ³¹⁹And you, Mr. Price?”

³²⁰“A clerk,” said I.

³²¹“I have every hope that the company may accommodate you. ³²²I will let you know about it as soon as we come to any conclusion. ³²³And now I beg that you will go. ³²⁴For God's sake leave me to myself!”

³²⁵These last words were shot out of him, as though the constraint which he was evidently setting upon himself had suddenly and utterly burst asunder. ³²⁶Holmes and I glanced at each other, and Hall Pycroft took a step towards the table.

³²⁷“You forget, Mr. Pinner, that I am here by appointment to receive some directions from you,” said he.

³²⁸“Certainly, Mr. Pycroft, certainly,” the other resumed in a calmer tone. ³²⁹“You may wait here a moment; and there is no reason why your friends should not wait with you. ³³⁰I will be entirely at your service in three minutes, if I might trespass upon your patience so far.” ³³¹He rose with a very courteous air, and, bowing to us, he passed out through a door at the farther end of the room, which he closed behind him.

³³²“What now?” whispered Holmes. ³³³“Is he giving us the slip?”

³³⁴“Impossible,” answered Pycroft.

³³⁵“Why so?”

³³⁶“That door leads into an inner room.”

³³⁷“There is no exit?”

³³⁸“None.”

³³⁹“Is it furnished?”

³⁴⁰“It was empty yesterday.”

³⁴¹“Then what on earth can he be doing? ³⁴²There is something which I don't understand in his manner. ³⁴³If ever a man was three parts mad with terror, that man's name is Pinner. ³⁴⁴What can have put the shivers on him?”

³⁴⁵“He suspects that we are detectives,” I suggested.

³⁴⁶“That's it,” cried Pycroft.

³⁴⁷Holmes shook his head. ³⁴⁸“He did not turn pale. ³⁴⁹He was pale when we entered the room,” said he. ³⁵⁰“It is just possible that—”

³⁵¹His words were interrupted by a sharp rat-tat from the direction of the inner door.

³⁵²“What the deuce is he knocking at his own door for?” cried the clerk.

³⁵³Again and much louder came the rat-tat-tat. ³⁵⁴We all gazed expectantly at the closed door. ³⁵⁵Glancing at Holmes, I saw his face turn rigid, and he leaned forward in intense excitement. ³⁵⁶Then suddenly came a low guggling, gargling sound, and a brisk drumming upon woodwork. ³⁵⁷Holmes sprang frantically across the room and pushed at the door. ³⁵⁸It was fastened on the inner side. ³⁵⁹Following his example, we threw ourselves upon it with all our weight. ³⁶⁰One hinge snapped, then the other, and down came the door with a crash. ³⁶¹Rushing over it, we found ourselves in the inner room. ³⁶²It was empty.

³⁶³But it was only for a moment that we were at fault. ³⁶⁴At one corner, the corner nearest the room which we had left, there was a second door. ³⁶⁵Holmes sprang to it and pulled it open. ³⁶⁶A coat and waistcoat were lying on the floor, and from a hook behind the door, with his own braces round his neck, was hanging the managing director of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. ³⁶⁷His knees were

drawn up, his head hung at a dreadful angle to his body, and the clatter of his heels against the door made the noise which had broken in upon our conversation. ³⁶⁸In an instant I had caught him round the waist, and held him up while Holmes and Pycroft untied the elastic bands which had disappeared between the livid creases of skin. ³⁶⁹Then we carried him into the other room, where he lay with a clay-colored face, puffing his purple lips in and out with every breath—a dreadful wreck of all that he had been but five minutes before.

³⁷⁰“What do you think of him, Watson?” asked Holmes.

³⁷¹I stooped over him and examined him. ³⁷²His pulse was feeble and intermittent, but his breathing grew longer, and there was a little shivering of his eyelids, which showed a thin white slit of ball beneath.

³⁷³“It has been touch and go with him,” said I, “but he’ll live now. ³⁷⁴Just open that window, and hand me the water carafe.” ³⁷⁵I undid his collar, poured the cold water over his face, and raised and sank his arms until he drew a long, natural breath. ³⁷⁶“It’s only a question of time now,” said I, as I turned away from him.

³⁷⁷Holmes stood by the table, with his hands deep in his trouser’s pockets and his chin upon his breast.

³⁷⁸“I suppose we ought to call the police in now,” said he. ³⁷⁹“And yet I confess that I’d like to give them a complete case when they come.”

³⁸⁰“It’s a blessed mystery to me,” cried Pycroft, scratching his head. ³⁸¹“Whatever they wanted to bring me all the way up here for, and then—”

³⁸²“Pooh! ³⁸³All that is clear enough,” said Holmes impatiently. ³⁸⁴“It is this last sudden move.”

³⁸⁵“You understand the rest, then?”

³⁸⁶“I think that it is fairly obvious. ³⁸⁷What do you say, Watson?”

³⁸⁸I shrugged my shoulders. ³⁸⁹“I must confess that I am out of my depths,” said I.

³⁹⁰“Oh surely if you consider the events at first they can only point to one conclusion.”

³⁹¹“What do you make of them?”

³⁹²“Well, the whole thing hinges upon two points. ³⁹³The first is the making of Pycroft write a declaration by which he entered the service of this preposterous company. ³⁹⁴Do you not see how very suggestive that is?”

³⁹⁵“I am afraid I miss the point.”

³⁹⁶“Well, why did they want him to do it? ³⁹⁷Not as a business matter, for these arrangements are usually verbal, and there was no earthly business reason why this should be an exception. ³⁹⁸Don’t you see, my young friend, that they were very anxious to obtain a specimen of your handwriting, and had no other way of doing it?”

³⁹⁹“And why?”

⁴⁰⁰“Quite so. ⁴⁰¹Why? ⁴⁰²When we answer that we have made some progress with our little problem. ⁴⁰³Why? ⁴⁰⁴There can be only one adequate reason. ⁴⁰⁵Someone wanted to learn to imitate your writing, and had to procure a specimen of it first. ⁴⁰⁶And now if we pass on to the second point we find that each throws light upon the other. ⁴⁰⁷That point is the request made by Pinner that you should not resign your place, but should leave the manager of this important business in the full expectation that a Mr. Hall Pycroft, whom he had never seen, was about to enter the office upon the Monday morning.”

⁴⁰⁸“My God!” cried our client, “what a blind beetle I have been!”

⁴⁰⁹“Now you see the point about the handwriting. ⁴¹⁰Suppose that some one turned up in your place who wrote a completely different hand from that in which you had applied for the vacancy, of course the game would have been up. ⁴¹¹But in the interval the rogue had learned to imitate you, and his position was therefore secure, as I presume that nobody in the office had ever set eyes upon you.”

⁴¹²“Not a soul,” groaned Hall Pycroft.

⁴¹³“Very good. ⁴¹⁴Of course it was of the utmost importance to prevent you from thinking better of it, and also to keep you from coming into contact with any one who might tell you that your double was at work in Mawson's office. ⁴¹⁵Therefore they gave you a handsome advance on your salary, and ran you off to the Midlands, where they gave you enough work to do to prevent your going to London, where you might have burst their little game up. ⁴¹⁶That is all plain enough.”

⁴¹⁷“But why should this man pretend to be his own brother?”

⁴¹⁸“Well, that is pretty clear also. ⁴¹⁹There are evidently only two of them in it. ⁴²⁰The other is impersonating you at the office. ⁴²¹This one acted as your engager, and then found that he could not find you an employer without admitting a third person into his plot. ⁴²²That he was most unwilling to do. ⁴²³He changed his appearance as far as he could, and trusted that the likeness, which you could not fail to observe, would be put down to a family resemblance. ⁴²⁴But for the happy chance of the gold stuffing, your suspicions would probably never have been aroused.”

⁴²⁵Hall Pycroft shook his clinched hands in the air. ⁴²⁶“Good Lord!” he cried, “while I have been fooled in this way, what has this other Hall Pycroft been doing at Mawson's? ⁴²⁷What should we do, Mr. Holmes? ⁴²⁸Tell me what to do.”

⁴²⁹“We must wire to Mawson's.”

⁴³⁰“They shut at twelve on Saturdays.”

⁴³¹“Never mind. ⁴³²There may be some door-keeper or attendant—”

⁴³³“Ah yes, they keep a permanent guard there on account of the value of the securities that they hold.

⁴³⁴I remember hearing it talked of in the City.”

⁴³⁵“Very good; we shall wire to him, and see if all is well, and if a clerk of your name is working there.

⁴³⁶That is clear enough; but what is not so clear is why at sight of us one of the rogues should instantly walk out of the room and hang himself.”

⁴³⁷“The paper!” croaked a voice behind us. ⁴³⁸The man was sitting up, blanched and ghastly, with returning reason in his eyes, and hands which rubbed nervously at the broad red band which still encircled his throat.

⁴³⁹“The paper! ⁴⁴⁰Of course!” yelled Holmes, in a paroxysm of excitement. ⁴⁴¹“Idiot that I was! ⁴⁴²I thought so much of our visit that the paper never entered my head for an instant. ⁴⁴³To be sure, the secret must be there.” ⁴⁴⁴He flattened it out upon the table, and a cry of triumph burst from his lips. ⁴⁴⁵“Look at this, Watson,” he cried. ⁴⁴⁶“It is a London paper, an early edition of the Evening Standard. ⁴⁴⁷Here is what we want. ⁴⁴⁸Look at the headlines: ⁴⁴⁹‘Crime in the City. ⁴⁵⁰Murder at Mawson & Williams's. ⁴⁵¹Gigantic attempted Robbery. ⁴⁵²Capture of the Criminal.’ ⁴⁵³Here, Watson, we are all equally anxious to hear it, so kindly read it aloud to us.”

⁴⁵⁴It appeared from its position in the paper to have been the one event of importance in town, and the account of it ran in this way:

⁴⁵⁵“A desperate attempt at robbery, culminating in the death of one man and the capture of the criminal, occurred this afternoon in the City. ⁴⁵⁶For some time back Mawson & Williams, the famous financial house, have been the guardians of securities which amount in the aggregate to a sum of considerably over a million sterling. ⁴⁵⁷So conscious was the manager of the responsibility which devolved upon him in consequence of the great interests at stake that safes of the very latest construction have been employed, and an armed watchman has been left day and night in the building. ⁴⁵⁸It appears that last week a new clerk named Hall Pycroft was engaged by the firm. ⁴⁵⁹This person appears to have been none other than Beddington, the famous forger and cracksman, who, with his brother, had only recently emerged from a five years' spell of penal servitude. ⁴⁶⁰By some means, which are not yet clear, he succeeded in winning, under a false name, this official position in the office, which he utilized in order to obtain moulding of various locks, and a thorough knowledge of the position of the strong room and the safes.

⁴⁶¹“It is customary at Mawson's for the clerks to leave at midday on Saturday. ⁴⁶²Sergeant Tuson, of the City Police, was somewhat surprised, therefore to see a gentleman with a carpet bag come down the steps at twenty minutes past one. ⁴⁶³His suspicions being aroused, the sergeant followed the man, and with the aid of Constable Pollack succeeded, after a most desperate resistance, in arresting him. ⁴⁶⁴It was at once clear that a daring and gigantic robbery had been committed. ⁴⁶⁵Nearly a hundred thousand pounds' worth of American railway bonds, with a large amount of scrip in mines and other companies, was discovered in the bag. ⁴⁶⁶On examining the premises the body of the unfortunate watchman was found doubled up and thrust into the largest of the safes, where it would not have been discovered until Monday morning had it not been for the prompt action of Sergeant Tuson. ⁴⁶⁷The man's skull had been shattered by a blow from a poker delivered from behind. ⁴⁶⁸There could be no doubt that Beddington had obtained entrance by pretending that he had left something behind him, and having murdered the watchman, rapidly rifled the large safe, and then made off with his booty. ⁴⁶⁹His brother, who usually works with him, has not appeared in this job as far as can at present be ascertained, although the police are making energetic inquiries as to his whereabouts.”

⁴⁷⁰“Well, we may save the police some little trouble in that direction,” said Holmes, glancing at the haggard figure huddled up by the window. ⁴⁷¹“Human nature is a strange mixture, Watson. ⁴⁷²You see that even a villain and murderer can inspire such affection that his brother turns to suicide when he learns that his neck is forfeited. ⁴⁷³However, we have no choice as to our action. ⁴⁷⁴The doctor and I will remain on guard, Mr. Pycroft, if you will have the kindness to step out for the police.”

The “Gloria Scott”

¹“I have some papers here,” said my friend Sherlock Holmes, as we sat one winter's night on either side of the fire, “which I really think, Watson, that it would be worth your while to glance over. ²These are the documents in the extraordinary case of the Gloria Scott, and this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with horror when he read it.”

³He had picked from a drawer a little tarnished cylinder, and, undoing the tape, he handed me a short note scrawled upon a half-sheet of slate gray-paper.

⁴“The supply of game for London is going steadily up,” it ran. ⁵“Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant's life.”

⁶As I glanced up from reading this enigmatical message, I saw Holmes chuckling at the expression upon my face.

⁷“You look a little bewildered,” said he.

⁸“I cannot see how such a message as this could inspire horror. ⁹It seems to me to be rather grotesque than otherwise.”

¹⁰“Very likely. ¹¹Yet the fact remains that the reader, who was a fine, robust old man, was knocked clean down by it as if it had been the butt end of a pistol.”

¹²“You arouse my curiosity,” said I. ¹³“But why did you say just now that there were very particular reasons why I should study this case?”

¹⁴“Because it was the first in which I was ever engaged.”

¹⁵I had often endeavored to elicit from my companion what had first turned his mind in the direction of criminal research, but had never caught him before in a communicative humor. ¹⁶Now he sat forward in his arm-chair and spread out the documents upon his knees. ¹⁷Then he lit his pipe and sat for some time smoking and turning them over.

¹⁸“You never heard me talk of Victor Trevor?” he asked. ¹⁹“He was the only friend I made during the two years I was at college. ²⁰I was never a very sociable fellow, Watson, always rather fond of moping in my rooms and working out my own little methods of thought, so that I never mixed much with the men of my year. ²¹Bar fencing and boxing I had few athletic tastes, and then my line of study was quite distinct from that of the other fellows, so that we had no points of contact at all. ²²Trevor was the only man I knew, and that only through the accident of his bull terrier freezing on to my ankle one morning as I went down to chapel.

²³“It was a prosaic way of forming a friendship, but it was effective. ²⁴I was laid by the heels for ten days, but Trevor used to come in to inquire after me. ²⁵At first it was only a minute's chat, but soon his visits lengthened, and before the end of the term we were close friends. ²⁶He was a hearty, full-blooded fellow, full of spirits and energy, the very opposite to me in most respects, but we had some subjects in common, and it was a bond of union when I found that he was as friendless as I. ²⁷Finally, he invited me down to his father's place at Donnithorpe, in Norfolk, and I accepted his hospitality for a month of the long vacation.

²⁸“Old Trevor was evidently a man of some wealth and consideration, a J.P., and a landed proprietor. ²⁹Donnithorpe is a little hamlet just to the north of Langmere, in the country of the Broads. ³⁰The house was an old-fashioned, wide-spread, oak-beamed brick building, with a fine lime-lined avenue leading up to it. ³¹There was excellent wild-duck shooting in the fens, remarkably good fishing, a small but

select library, taken over, as I understood, from a former occupant, and a tolerable cook, so that he would be a fastidious man who could not put in a pleasant month there.

³²“Trevor senior was a widower, and my friend his only son.

³³“There had been a daughter, I heard, but she had died of diphtheria while on a visit to Birmingham.

³⁴The father interested me extremely. ³⁵He was a man of little culture, but with a considerable amount of rude strength, both physically and mentally. ³⁶He knew hardly any books, but he had traveled far, had seen much of the world. ³⁷And had remembered all that he had learned. ³⁸In person he was a thick-set, burly man with a shock of grizzled hair, a brown, weather-beaten face, and blue eyes which were keen to the verge of fierceness. ³⁹Yet he had a reputation for kindness and charity on the country-side, and was noted for the leniency of his sentences from the bench.

⁴⁰“One evening, shortly after my arrival, we were sitting over a glass of port after dinner, when young Trevor began to talk about those habits of observation and inference which I had already formed into a system, although I had not yet appreciated the part which they were to play in my life. ⁴¹The old man evidently thought that his son was exaggerating in his description of one or two trivial feats which I had performed.

⁴²“‘Come, now, Mr. Holmes,’ said he, laughing good-humoredly. ⁴³‘I’m an excellent subject, if you can deduce anything from me.’

⁴⁴“‘I fear there is not very much,’ I answered; ‘I might suggest that you have gone about in fear of some personal attack within the last twelve months.’

⁴⁵“The laugh faded from his lips, and he stared at me in great surprise.

⁴⁶“‘Well, that’s true enough,’ said he. ⁴⁷‘You know, Victor,’ turning to his son, ‘when we broke up that poaching gang they swore to knife us, and Sir Edward Holly has actually been attacked. ⁴⁸I’ve always been on my guard since then, though I have no idea how you know it.’

⁴⁹“‘You have a very handsome stick,’ I answered. ⁵⁰‘By the inscription I observed that you had not had it more than a year. ⁵¹But you have taken some pains to bore the head of it and pour melted lead into the hole so as to make it a formidable weapon. ⁵²I argued that you would not take such precautions unless you had some danger to fear.’

⁵³“‘Anything else?’ he asked, smiling.

⁵⁴“‘You have boxed a good deal in your youth.’

⁵⁵“‘Right again. ⁵⁶How did you know it? ⁵⁷Is my nose knocked a little out of the straight?’

⁵⁸“‘No,’ said I. ⁵⁹‘It is your ears. ⁶⁰They have the peculiar flattening and thickening which marks the boxing man.’

⁶¹“‘Anything else?’

⁶²“‘You have done a good deal of digging by your callosities.’

⁶³“‘Made all my money at the gold fields.’

⁶⁴“‘You have been in New Zealand.’

⁶⁵“‘Right again.’

⁶⁶“‘You have visited Japan.’

⁶⁷“‘Quite true.’

⁶⁸“And you have been most intimately associated with some one whose initials were J. A., and whom you afterwards were eager to entirely forget.”

⁶⁹“Mr. Trevor stood slowly up, fixed his large blue eyes upon me with a strange wild stare, and then pitched forward, with his face among the nutshells which strewed the cloth, in a dead faint.

⁷⁰“You can imagine, Watson, how shocked both his son and I were. ⁷¹His attack did not last long, however, for when we undid his collar, and sprinkled the water from one of the finger-glasses over his face, he gave a gasp or two and sat up.

⁷²“Ah, boys,” said he, forcing a smile, “I hope I haven't frightened you. ⁷³Strong as I look, there is a weak place in my heart, and it does not take much to knock me over. ⁷⁴I don't know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and of fancy would be children in your hands. ⁷⁵That's your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world.”

⁷⁶“And that recommendation, with the exaggerated estimate of my ability with which he prefaced it, was, if you will believe me, Watson, the very first thing which ever made me feel that a profession might be made out of what had up to that time been the merest hobby. ⁷⁷At the moment, however, I was too much concerned at the sudden illness of my host to think of anything else.

⁷⁸“I hope that I have said nothing to pain you?” said I.

⁷⁹“Well, you certainly touched upon rather a tender point. ⁸⁰Might I ask how you know, and how much you know?” ⁸¹He spoke now in a half-jesting fashion, but a look of terror still lurked at the back of his eyes.

⁸²“It is simplicity itself,” said I. ⁸³“When you bared your arm to draw that fish into the boat I saw that J. A. had been tattooed in the bend of the elbow. ⁸⁴The letters were still legible, but it was perfectly clear from their blurred appearance, and from the staining of the skin round them, that efforts had been made to obliterate them. ⁸⁵It was obvious, then, that those initials had once been very familiar to you, and that you had afterwards wished to forget them.”

⁸⁶“What an eye you have!” he cried, with a sigh of relief. ⁸⁷“It is just as you say. ⁸⁸But we won't talk of it. ⁸⁹Of all ghosts the ghosts of our old lovers are the worst. ⁹⁰Come into the billiard-room and have a quiet cigar.”

⁹¹“From that day, amid all his cordiality, there was always a touch of suspicion in Mr. Trevor's manner towards me. ⁹²Even his son remarked it. ⁹³“You've given the governor such a turn,” said he, “that he'll never be sure again of what you know and what you don't know.” ⁹⁴He did not mean to show it, I am sure, but it was so strongly in his mind that it peeped out at every action. ⁹⁵At last I became so convinced that I was causing him uneasiness that I drew my visit to a close. ⁹⁶On the very day, however, before I left, an incident occurred which proved in the sequel to be of importance.

⁹⁷“We were sitting out upon the lawn on garden chairs, the three of us, basking in the sun and admiring the view across the Broads, when a maid came out to say that there was a man at the door who wanted to see Mr. Trevor.

⁹⁸“What is his name?” asked my host.

⁹⁹“He would not give any.”

¹⁰⁰“What does he want, then?”

¹⁰¹“He says that you know him, and that he only wants a moment's conversation.”

¹⁰²“Show him round here.” ¹⁰³An instant afterwards there appeared a little wizened fellow with a cringing manner and a shambling style of walking. ¹⁰⁴He wore an open jacket, with a splotch of tar on the sleeve, a red-and-black check shirt, dungaree trousers, and heavy boots badly worn. ¹⁰⁵His face was thin and brown and crafty, with a perpetual smile upon it, which showed an irregular line of yellow teeth, and his crinkled hands were half closed in a way that is distinctive of sailors. ¹⁰⁶As he came slouching across the lawn I heard Mr. Trevor make a sort of hiccoughing noise in his throat, and jumping out of his chair, he ran into the house. ¹⁰⁷He was back in a moment, and I smelt a strong reek of brandy as he passed me.

¹⁰⁸“Well, my man,” said he. ¹⁰⁹“What can I do for you?”

¹¹⁰“The sailor stood looking at him with puckered eyes, and with the same loose-lipped smile upon his face.

¹¹¹“You don't know me?” he asked.

¹¹²“Why, dear me, it is surely Hudson,” said Mr. Trevor in a tone of surprise.

¹¹³“Hudson it is, sir,” said the seaman. ¹¹⁴“Why, it's thirty year and more since I saw you last. ¹¹⁵Here you are in your house, and me still picking my salt meat out of the harness cask.”

¹¹⁶“Tut, you will find that I have not forgotten old times,” cried Mr. Trevor, and, walking towards the sailor, he said something in a low voice. ¹¹⁷“Go into the kitchen,” he continued out loud, “and you will get food and drink. ¹¹⁸I have no doubt that I shall find you a situation.”

¹¹⁹“Thank you, sir,” said the seaman, touching his fore-lock. ¹²⁰“I'm just off a two-yearer in an eight-knot tramp, short-handed at that, and I wants a rest. ¹²¹I thought I'd get it either with Mr. Beddoes or with you.”

¹²²“Ah!” cried Trevor. ¹²³“You know where Mr. Beddoes is?”

¹²⁴“Bless you, sir, I know where all my old friends are,” said the fellow with a sinister smile, and he slouched off after the maid to the kitchen. ¹²⁵Mr. Trevor mumbled something to us about having been shipmate with the man when he was going back to the diggings, and then, leaving us on the lawn, he went indoors. ¹²⁶An hour later, when we entered the house, we found him stretched dead drunk upon the dining-room sofa. ¹²⁷The whole incident left a most ugly impression upon my mind, and I was not sorry next day to leave Donnithorpe behind me, for I felt that my presence must be a source of embarrassment to my friend.

¹²⁸“All this occurred during the first month of the long vacation. ¹²⁹I went up to my London rooms, where I spent seven weeks working out a few experiments in organic chemistry. ¹³⁰One day, however, when the autumn was far advanced and the vacation drawing to a close, I received a telegram from my friend imploring me to return to Donnithorpe, and saying that he was in great need of my advice and assistance. ¹³¹Of course I dropped everything and set out for the North once more.

¹³²“He met me with the dog-cart at the station, and I saw at a glance that the last two months had been very trying ones for him. ¹³³He had grown thin and careworn, and had lost the loud, cheery manner for which he had been remarkable.

¹³⁴“The governor is dying,” were the first words he said.

¹³⁵“Impossible!” I cried. ¹³⁶“What is the matter?”

¹³⁷“Apoplexy. ¹³⁸Nervous shock. ¹³⁹He's been on the verge all day. ¹⁴⁰I doubt if we shall find him alive.”

¹⁴¹“I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news.

¹⁴²“What has caused it?” I asked.

¹⁴³“Ah, that is the point. ¹⁴⁴Jump in and we can talk it over while we drive. ¹⁴⁵You remember that fellow who came upon the evening before you left us?”

¹⁴⁶“Perfectly.”

¹⁴⁷“Do you know who it was that we let into the house that day?”

¹⁴⁸“I have no idea.”

¹⁴⁹“It was the devil, Holmes,” he cried.

¹⁵⁰“I stared at him in astonishment.

¹⁵¹“Yes, it was the devil himself. ¹⁵²We have not had a peaceful hour since—not one. ¹⁵³The governor has never held up his head from that evening, and now the life has been crushed out of him and his heart broken, all through this accursed Hudson.”

¹⁵⁴“What power had he, then?”

¹⁵⁵“Ah, that is what I would give so much to know. ¹⁵⁶The kindly, charitable, good old governor—how could he have fallen into the clutches of such a ruffian! ¹⁵⁷But I am so glad that you have come, Holmes. ¹⁵⁸I trust very much to your judgment and discretion, and I know that you will advise me for the best.”

¹⁵⁹“We were dashing along the smooth white country road, with the long stretch of the Broads in front of us glimmering in the red light of the setting sun. ¹⁶⁰From a grove upon our left I could already see the high chimneys and the flag-staff which marked the squire's dwelling.

¹⁶¹“My father made the fellow gardener,” said my companion, “and then, as that did not satisfy him, he was promoted to be butler. ¹⁶²The house seemed to be at his mercy, and he wandered about and did what he chose in it. ¹⁶³The maids complained of his drunken habits and his vile language. ¹⁶⁴The dad raised their wages all round to recompense them for the annoyance. ¹⁶⁵The fellow would take the boat and my father's best gun and treat himself to little shooting trips. ¹⁶⁶And all this with such a sneering, leering, insolent face that I would have knocked him down twenty times over if he had been a man of my own age. ¹⁶⁷I tell you, Holmes, I have had to keep a tight hold upon myself all this time; and now I am asking myself whether, if I had let myself go a little more, I might not have been a wiser man.

¹⁶⁸“Well, matters went from bad to worse with us, and this animal Hudson became more and more intrusive, until at last, on making some insolent reply to my father in my presence one day, I took him by the shoulders and turned him out of the room. ¹⁶⁹He slunk away with a livid face and two venomous eyes which uttered more threats than his tongue could do. ¹⁷⁰I don't know what passed between the poor dad and him after that, but the dad came to me next day and asked me whether I would mind apologizing to Hudson. ¹⁷¹I refused, as you can imagine, and asked my father how he could allow such a wretch to take such liberties with himself and his household.

¹⁷²““Ah, my boy,” said he, “it is all very well to talk, but you don't know how I am placed. ¹⁷³But you shall know, Victor. I'll see that you shall know, come what may. ¹⁷⁴You wouldn't believe harm of your poor old father, would you, lad?” ¹⁷⁵He was very much moved, and shut himself up in the study all day, where I could see through the window that he was writing busily.

¹⁷⁶“That evening there came what seemed to me to be a grand release, for Hudson told us that he was going to leave us. ¹⁷⁷He walked into the dining-room as we sat after dinner, and announced his intention in the thick voice of a half-drunken man.

¹⁷⁸““I've had enough of Norfolk,” said he. ¹⁷⁹“I'll run down to Mr. Beddoes in Hampshire. ¹⁸⁰He'll be as glad to see me as you were, I dare say.”

¹⁸¹““You're not going away in any kind of spirit, Hudson, I hope,” said my father, with a tameness which mad my blood boil.

¹⁸²““I've not had my 'pology,” said he sulkily, glancing in my direction.

¹⁸³““Victor, you will acknowledge that you have used this worthy fellow rather roughly,” said the dad, turning to me.

¹⁸⁴““On the contrary, I think that we have both shown extraordinary patience towards him,” I answered.

¹⁸⁵““Oh, you do, do you?” he snarls. ¹⁸⁶“Very good, mate. ¹⁸⁷We'll see about that!”

¹⁸⁸“He slouched out of the room, and half an hour afterwards left the house, leaving my father in a state of pitiable nervousness. ¹⁸⁹Night after night I heard him pacing his room, and it was just as he was recovering his confidence that the blow did at last fall.’

¹⁹⁰“And how?’ I asked eagerly.

¹⁹¹“In a most extraordinary fashion. ¹⁹²A letter arrived for my father yesterday evening, bearing the Fordingbridge post-mark. ¹⁹³My father read it, clapped both his hands to his head, and began running round the room in little circles like a man who has been driven out of his senses. ¹⁹⁴When I at last drew him down on to the sofa, his mouth and eyelids were all puckered on one side, and I saw that he had a stroke. ¹⁹⁵Dr. Fordham came over at once. ¹⁹⁶We put him to bed; but the paralysis has spread, he has shown no sign of returning consciousness, and I think that we shall hardly find him alive.’

¹⁹⁷“You horrify me, Trevor!’ I cried. ¹⁹⁸“What then could have been in this letter to cause so dreadful a result?’

¹⁹⁹“Nothing. ²⁰⁰There lies the inexplicable part of it. ²⁰¹The message was absurd and trivial. ²⁰²Ah, my God, it is as I feared!’

²⁰³“As he spoke we came round the curve of the avenue, and saw in the fading light that every blind in the house had been drawn down. ²⁰⁴As we dashed up to the door, my friend's face convulsed with grief, a gentleman in black emerged from it.

²⁰⁵““When did it happen, doctor?’ asked Trevor.

²⁰⁶““Almost immediately after you left.’

²⁰⁷““Did he recover consciousness?’

²⁰⁸““For an instant before the end.’

²⁰⁹““Any message for me?’

²¹⁰““Only that the papers were in the back drawer of the Japanese cabinet.’

²¹¹“My friend ascended with the doctor to the chamber of death, while I remained in the study, turning the whole matter over and over in my head, and feeling as sombre as ever I had done in my life. ²¹²What was the past of this Trevor, pugilist, traveler, and gold-digger, and how had he placed himself in the power of this acid-faced seaman? ²¹³Why, too, should he faint at an allusion to the half-effaced initials upon his arm, and die of fright when he had a letter from Fordingham? ²¹⁴Then I remembered that Fordingham was in Hampshire, and that this Mr. Beddoes, whom the seaman had gone to visit and presumably to blackmail, had also been mentioned as living in Hampshire. ²¹⁵The letter, then, might either come from Hudson, the seaman, saying that he had betrayed the guilty secret which appeared to exist, or it might come from Beddoes, warning an old confederate that such a betrayal was imminent. ²¹⁶So far it seemed clear enough. ²¹⁷But then how could this letter be trivial and grotesque, as described by the son? ²¹⁸He must have misread it. ²¹⁹If so, it must have been one of those ingenious secret codes

which mean one thing while they seem to mean another. ²²⁰I must see this letter. ²²¹If there were a hidden meaning in it, I was confident that I could pluck it forth. ²²²For an hour I sat pondering over it in the gloom, until at last a weeping maid brought in a lamp, and close at her heels came my friend Trevor, pale but composed, with these very papers which lie upon my knee held in his grasp. ²²³He sat down opposite to me, drew the lamp to the edge of the table, and handed me a short note scribbled, as you see, upon a single sheet of gray paper. ²²⁴‘The supply of game for London is going steadily up,’ it ran. ²²⁵‘Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant's life.’

²²⁶‘I dare say my face looked as bewildered as yours did just now when first I read this message. ²²⁷Then I reread it very carefully. ²²⁸It was evidently as I had thought, and some secret meaning must lie buried in this strange combination of words. ²²⁹Or could it be that there was a prearranged significance to such phrases as ‘fly-paper’ and ‘hen-pheasant’? ²³⁰Such a meaning would be arbitrary and could not be deduced in any way. ²³¹And yet I was loath to believe that this was the case, and the presence of the word Hudson seemed to show that the subject of the message was as I had guessed, and that it was from Beddoes rather than the sailor. ²³²I tried it backwards, but the combination ‘life pheasant's hen’ was not encouraging. ²³³Then I tried alternate words, but neither ‘the of for’ nor ‘supply game London’ promised to throw any light upon it.

²³⁴‘And then in an instant the key of the riddle was in my hands, and I saw that every third word, beginning with the first, would give a message which might well drive old Trevor to despair.

²³⁵‘It was short and terse, the warning, as I now read it to my companion:

²³⁶‘‘The game is up. ²³⁷Hudson has told all. ²³⁸Fly for your life.’

²³⁹‘Victor Trevor sank his face into his shaking hands, ‘It must be that, I suppose,’ said he. ²⁴⁰‘This is worse than death, for it means disgrace as well. ²⁴¹But what is the meaning of these “head-keepers” and “hen-pheasants”?’

²⁴²‘‘It means nothing to the message, but it might mean a good deal to us if we had no other means of discovering the sender. ²⁴³You see that he has begun by writing “The ... game ... is,” and so on. ²⁴⁴Afterwards he had, to fulfill the prearranged cipher, to fill in any two words in each space. ²⁴⁵He would naturally use the first words which came to his mind, and if there were so many which referred to sport among them, you may be tolerably sure that he is either an ardent shot or interested in breeding. ²⁴⁶Do you know anything of this Beddoes?’

²⁴⁷‘‘Why, now that you mention it,’ said he, ‘I remember that my poor father used to have an invitation from him to shoot over his preserves every autumn.’

²⁴⁸‘‘Then it is undoubtedly from him that the note comes,’ said I. ²⁴⁹‘It only remains for us to find out what this secret was which the sailor Hudson seems to have held over the heads of these two wealthy and respected men.’

²⁵⁰‘‘Alas, Holmes, I fear that it is one of sin and shame!’ cried my friend. ²⁵¹‘But from you I shall have no secrets. ²⁵²Here is the statement which was drawn up by my father when he knew that the danger from Hudson had become imminent. ²⁵³I found it in the Japanese cabinet, as he told the doctor. ²⁵⁴Take it and read it to me, for I have neither the strength nor the courage to do it myself.’

²⁵⁵‘These are the very papers, Watson, which he handed to me, and I will read them to you, as I read them in the old study that night to him. ²⁵⁶They are endorsed outside, as you see, ‘Some particulars of the voyage of the bark Gloria Scott, from her leaving Falmouth on the 8th October, 1855, to her destruction in N. Lat. 15° 20', W. Long. 25° 14' on Nov. 6th.’ ²⁵⁷It is in the form of a letter, and runs in this way:

²⁵⁸“My dear, dear son, now that approaching disgrace begins to darken the closing years of my life, I can write with all truth and honesty that it is not the terror of the law, it is not the loss of my position in the county, nor is it my fall in the eyes of all who have known me, which cuts me to the heart; but it is the thought that you should come to blush for me—you who love me and who have seldom, I hope, had reason to do other than respect me. ²⁵⁹But if the blow falls which is forever hanging over me, then I should wish you to read this, that you may know straight from me how far I have been to blame. ²⁶⁰On the other hand, if all should go well (which may kind God Almighty grant!), then if by any chance this paper should be still undestroyed and should fall into your hands, I conjure you, by all you hold sacred, by the memory of your dear mother, and by the love which had been between us, to hurl it into the fire and to never give one thought to it again.

²⁶¹“If then your eye goes onto read this line, I know that I shall already have been exposed and dragged from my home, or as is more likely, for you know that my heart is weak, by lying with my tongue sealed forever in death. ²⁶²In either case the time for suppression is past, and every word which I tell you is the naked truth, and this I swear as I hope for mercy.

²⁶³“My name, dear lad, is not Trevor. ²⁶⁴I was James Armitage in my younger days, and you can understand now the shock that it was to me a few weeks ago when your college friend addressed me in words which seemed to imply that he had surprised my secret. ²⁶⁵As Armitage it was that I entered a London banking-house, and as Armitage I was convicted of breaking my country's laws, and was sentenced to transportation. ²⁶⁶Do not think very harshly of me, laddie. ²⁶⁷It was a debt of honor, so called, which I had to pay, and I used money which was not my own to do it, in the certainty that I could replace it before there could be any possibility of its being missed. ²⁶⁸But the most dreadful ill-luck pursued me. ²⁶⁹The money which I had reckoned upon never came to hand, and a premature examination of accounts exposed my deficit. ²⁷⁰The case might have been dealt leniently with, but the laws were more harshly administered thirty years ago than now, and on my twenty-third birthday I found myself chained as a felon with thirty-seven other convicts in 'tween-decks of the bark Gloria Scott, bound for Australia.

²⁷¹“It was the year '55 when the Crimean war was at its height, and the old convict ships had been largely used as transports in the Black Sea. ²⁷²The government was compelled, therefore, to use smaller and less suitable vessels for sending out their prisoners. ²⁷³The Gloria Scott had been in the Chinese tea-trade, but she was an old-fashioned, heavy-bowed, broad-beamed craft, and the new clippers had cut her out. ²⁷⁴She was a five-hundred-ton boat; and besides her thirty-eight jail-birds, she carried twenty-six of a crew, eighteen soldiers, a captain, three mates, a doctor, a chaplain, and four warders. ²⁷⁵Nearly a hundred souls were in her, all told, when we set sail from Falmouth.

²⁷⁶“The partitions between the cells of the convicts, instead of being of thick oak, as is usual in convict-ships, were quite thin and frail. ²⁷⁷The man next to me, upon the aft side, was one whom I had particularly noticed when we were led down the quay. ²⁷⁸He was a young man with a clear, hairless face, a long, thin nose, and rather nut-cracker jaws. ²⁷⁹He carried his head very jauntily in the air, had a swaggering style of walking, and was, above all else, remarkable for his extraordinary height. ²⁸⁰I don't think any of our heads would have come up to his shoulder, and I am sure that he could not have measured less than six and a half feet. ²⁸¹It was strange among so many sad and weary faces to see one which was full of energy and resolution. ²⁸²The sight of it was to me like a fire in a snow-storm. ²⁸³I was glad, then, to find that he was my neighbor, and gladder still when, in the dead of the night, I heard a whisper close to my ear, and found that he had managed to cut an opening in the board which separated us.

²⁸⁴““Hullo, chummy!” said he, “what's your name, and what are you here for?”

²⁸⁵“I answered him, and asked in turn who I was talking with.

²⁸⁶““I'm Jack Prendergast,” said he, “and by God! ²⁸⁷You'll learn to bless my name before you've done with me.”

²⁸⁸“I remembered hearing of his case, for it was one which had made an immense sensation throughout the country some time before my own arrest. ²⁸⁹He was a man of good family and of great ability, but of incurably vicious habits, who had, by an ingenious system of fraud, obtained huge sums of money from the leading London merchants.

²⁹⁰““Ha, ha! ²⁹¹You remember my case!” said he proudly.

²⁹²““Very well, indeed.”

²⁹³““Then maybe you remember something queer about it?”

²⁹⁴““What was that, then?”

²⁹⁵““I'd had nearly a quarter of a million, hadn't I?”

²⁹⁶““So it was said.”

²⁹⁷““But none was recovered, eh?”

²⁹⁸““No.”

²⁹⁹““Well, where d'ye suppose the balance is?” he asked.

³⁰⁰““I have no idea,” said I.

³⁰¹““Right between my finger and thumb,” he cried. ³⁰²“By God! ³⁰³I've got more pounds to my name than you've hairs on your head. ³⁰⁴And if you've money, my son, and know how to handle it and spread it, you can do anything. ³⁰⁵Now, you don't think it likely that a man who could do anything is going to wear his breeches out sitting in the stinking hold of a rat-gutted, beetle-ridden, mouldy old coffin of a Chin China coaster. ³⁰⁶No, sir, such a man will look after himself and will look after his chums. ³⁰⁷You may lay to that! ³⁰⁸You hold on to him, and you may kiss the book that he'll haul you through.”

³⁰⁹“That was his style of talk, and at first I thought it meant nothing; but after a while, when he had tested me and sworn me in with all possible solemnity, he let me understand that there really was a plot to gain command of the vessel. ³¹⁰A dozen of the prisoners had hatched it before they came aboard, Prendergast was the leader, and his money was the motive power.

³¹¹““I'd a partner,” said he, “a rare good man, as true as a stock to a barrel. ³¹²He's got the dibbs, he has, and where do you think he is at this moment? ³¹³Why, he's the chaplain of this ship—the chaplain, no less! ³¹⁴He came aboard with a black coat, and his papers right, and money enough in his box to buy the thing right up from keel to main-truck. ³¹⁵The crew are his, body and soul. ³¹⁶He could buy 'em at so much a gross with a cash discount, and he did it before ever they signed on. ³¹⁷He's got two of the warders and Mercer, the second mate, and he'd get the captain himself, if he thought him worth it.”

³¹⁸““What are we to do, then?” I asked.

³¹⁹““What do you think?” said he. ³²⁰“We'll make the coats of some of these soldiers redder than ever the tailor did.”

³²¹““But they are armed,” said I.

³²²““And so shall we be, my boy. ³²³There's a brace of pistols for every mother's son of us, and if we can't carry this ship, with the crew at our back, it's time we were all sent to a young misses' boarding-school. ³²⁴You speak to your mate upon the left to-night, and see if he is to be trusted.”

³²⁵“I did so, and found my other neighbor to be a young fellow in much the same position as myself, whose crime had been forgery. ³²⁶His name was Evans, but he afterwards changed it, like myself, and he is now a rich and prosperous man in the south of England. ³²⁷He was ready enough to join the conspiracy, as the only means of saving ourselves, and before we had crossed the Bay there were only two of the prisoners who were not in the secret. ³²⁸One of these was of weak mind, and we did not dare to trust him, and the other was suffering from jaundice, and could not be of any use to us.

³²⁹“From the beginning there was really nothing to prevent us from taking possession of the ship. ³³⁰The crew were a set of ruffians, specially picked for the job. ³³¹The sham chaplain came into our cells to exhort us, carrying a black bag, supposed to be full of tracts, and so often did he come that by the third day we had each stowed away at the foot of our beds a file, a brace of pistols, a pound of powder, and twenty slugs. ³³²Two of the warders were agents of Prendergast, and the second mate was his right-hand man. ³³³The captain, the two mates, two warders Lieutenant Martin, his eighteen soldiers, and the doctor were all that we had against us. ³³⁴Yet, safe as it was, we determined to neglect no precaution, and to make our attack suddenly by night. ³³⁵It came, however, more quickly than we expected, and in this way.

³³⁶“One evening, about the third week after our start, the doctor had come down to see one of the prisoners who was ill, and putting his hand down on the bottom of his bunk he felt the outline of the pistols. ³³⁷If he had been silent he might have blown the whole thing, but he was a nervous little chap, so he gave a cry of surprise and turned so pale that the man knew what was up in an instant and seized him. ³³⁸He was gagged before he could give the alarm, and tied down upon the bed. ³³⁹He had unlocked the door that led to the deck, and we were through it in a rush. ³⁴⁰The two sentries were shot down, and so was a corporal who came running to see what was the matter. ³⁴¹There were two more soldiers at the door of the state-room, and their muskets seemed not to be loaded, for they never fired upon us, and they were shot while trying to fix their bayonets. ³⁴²Then we rushed on into the captain's cabin, but as we pushed open the door there was an explosion from within, and there he lay with his brains smeared over the chart of the Atlantic which was pinned upon the table, while the chaplain stood with a smoking pistol in his hand at his elbow. ³⁴³The two mates had both been seized by the crew, and the whole business seemed to be settled.

³⁴⁴“The state-room was next the cabin, and we flocked in there and flopped down on the settees, all speaking together, for we were just mad with the feeling that we were free once more. ³⁴⁵There were lockers all round, and Wilson, the sham chaplain, knocked one of them in, and pulled out a dozen of brown sherry. ³⁴⁶We cracked off the necks of the bottles, poured the stuff out into tumblers, and were just tossing them off, when in an instant without warning there came the roar of muskets in our ears, and the saloon was so full of smoke that we could not see across the table. ³⁴⁷When it cleared again the place was a shambles. ³⁴⁸Wilson and eight others were wriggling on the top of each other on the floor, and the blood and the brown sherry on that table turn me sick now when I think of it. ³⁴⁹We were so cowed by the sight that I think we should have given the job up if had not been for Prendergast. ³⁵⁰He bellowed like a bull and rushed for the door with all that were left alive at his heels. ³⁵¹Out we ran, and there on the poop were the lieutenant and ten of his men. ³⁵²The swing skylights above the saloon table had been a bit open, and they had fired on us through the slit. ³⁵³We got on them before they could load, and they stood to it like men; but we had the upper hand of them, and in five minutes it was all over. ³⁵⁴My God! ³⁵⁵Was there ever a slaughter-house like that ship! ³⁵⁶Prendergast was like a raging devil, and he picked the soldiers up as if they had been children and threw them overboard alive or dead. ³⁵⁷There was one sergeant that was horribly wounded and yet kept on swimming for a surprising time, until some one in mercy blew out his brains. ³⁵⁸When the fighting was over there was no one left of our enemies except just the warders, the mates, and the doctor.

³⁵⁹“It was over them that the great quarrel arose. ³⁶⁰There were many of us who were glad enough to win back our freedom, and yet who had no wish to have murder on our souls. ³⁶¹It was one thing to

knock the soldiers over with their muskets in their hands, and it was another to stand by while men were being killed in cold blood. ³⁶²Eight of us, five convicts and three sailors, said that we would not see it done. ³⁶³But there was no moving Predergast and those who were with him. ³⁶⁴Our only chance of safety lay in making a clean job of it, said he, and he would not leave a tongue with power to wag in a witness-box. ³⁶⁵It nearly came to our sharing the fate of the prisoners, but at last he said that if we wished we might take a boat and go. ³⁶⁶We jumped at the offer, for we were already sick of these blookthirsty doings, and we saw that there would be worse before it was done. ³⁶⁷We were given a suit of sailor togs each, a barrel of water, two casks, one of junk and one of biscuits, and a compass. ³⁶⁸Prendergast threw us over a chart, told us that we were shipwrecked mariners whose ship had foundered in Lat. 15° and Long. 25° west, and then cut the painter and let us go.

³⁶⁹“And now I come to the most surprising part of my story, my dear son. ³⁷⁰The seamen had hauled the fore-yard aback during the rising, but now as we left them they brought it square again, and as there was a light wind from the north and east the bark began to draw slowly away from us. ³⁷¹Our boat lay, rising and falling, upon the long, smooth rollers, and Evans and I, who were the most educated of the party, were sitting in the sheets working out our position and planning what coast we should make for. ³⁷²It was a nice question, for the Cape de Verds were about five hundred miles to the north of us, and the African coast about seven hundred to the east. ³⁷³On the whole, as the wind was coming round to the north, we thought that Sierra Leone might be best, and turned our head in that direction, the bark being at that time nearly hull down on our starboard quarter. ³⁷⁴Suddenly as we looked at her we saw a dense black cloud of smoke shoot up from her, which hung like a monstrous tree upon the sky line. ³⁷⁵A few seconds later a roar like thunder burst upon our ears, and as the smoke thinned away there was no sign left of the Gloria Scott. ³⁷⁶In an instant we swept the boat's head round again and pulled with all our strength for the place where the haze still trailing over the water marked the scene of this catastrophe.

³⁷⁷“It was a long hour before we reached it, and at first we feared that we had come too late to save any one. ³⁷⁸A splintered boat and a number of crates and fragments of spars rising and falling on the waves showed us where the vessel had foundered; but there was no sign of life, and we had turned away in despair when we heard a cry for help, and saw at some distance a piece of wreckage with a man lying stretched across it. ³⁷⁹When we pulled him aboard the boat he proved to be a young seaman of the name of Hudson, who was so burned and exhausted that he could give us no account of what had happened until the following morning.

³⁸⁰“It seemed that after we had left, Prendergast and his gang had proceeded to put to death the five remaining prisoners. ³⁸¹The two warders had been shot and thrown overboard, and so also had the third mate. ³⁸²Prendergast then descended into the 'tween-decks and with his own hands cut the throat of the unfortunate surgeon. ³⁸³There only remained the first mate, who was a bold and active man. ³⁸⁴When he saw the convict approaching him with the bloody knife in his hand he kicked off his bonds, which he had somehow contrived to loosen, and rushing down the deck he plunged into the after-hold. ³⁸⁵A dozen convicts, who descended with their pistols in search of him, found him with a match-box in his hand seated beside an open powder-barrel, which was one of a hundred carried on board, and swearing that he would blow all hands up if he were in any way molested. ³⁸⁶An instant later the explosion occurred, though Hudson thought it was caused by the misdirected bullet of one of the convicts rather than the mate's match. ³⁸⁷Be the cause what I may, it was the end of the Gloria Scott and of the rabble who held command of her.

³⁸⁸“Such, in a few words, my dear boy, is the history of this terrible business in which I was involved. ³⁸⁹Next day we were picked up by the brig Hotspur, bound for Australia, whose captain found no difficulty in believing that we were the survivors of a passenger ship which had foundered. ³⁹⁰The transport ship Gloria Scott was set down by the Admiralty as being lost at sea, and no word has ever leaked out as to her true fate. ³⁹¹After an excellent voyage the Hotspur landed us at Sydney, where Evans

and I changed our names and made our way to the diggings, where, among the crowds who were gathered from all nations, we had no difficulty in losing our former identities. ³⁹²The rest I need not relate. ³⁹³We prospered, we traveled, we came back as rich colonials to England, and we bought country estates. ³⁹⁴For more than twenty years we have led peaceful and useful lives, and we hoped that our past was forever buried. ³⁹⁵Imagine, then, my feelings when in the seaman who came to us I recognized instantly the man who had been picked off the wreck. ³⁹⁶He had tracked us down somehow, and had set himself to live upon our fears. ³⁹⁷You will understand now how it was that I strove to keep the peace with him, and you will in some measure sympathize with me in the fears which fill me, now that he has gone from me to his other victim with threats upon his tongue.'

³⁹⁸"Underneath is written in a hand so shaky as to be hardly legible, 'Beddoes writes in cipher to say H. has told all. ³⁹⁹Sweet Lord, have mercy on our souls!'

⁴⁰⁰"That was the narrative which I read that night to young Trevor, and I think, Watson, that under the circumstances it was a dramatic one. ⁴⁰¹The good fellow was heart-broken at it, and went out to the Terai tea planting, where I hear that he is doing well. ⁴⁰²As to the sailor and Beddoes, neither of them was ever heard of again after that day on which the letter of warning was written. ⁴⁰³They both disappeared utterly and completely. ⁴⁰⁴No complaint had been lodged with the police, so that Beddoes had mistaken a threat for a deed. ⁴⁰⁵Hudson had been seen lurking about, and it was believed by the police that he had done away with Beddoes and had fled. ⁴⁰⁶For myself I believe that the truth was exactly the opposite. ⁴⁰⁷I think that it is most probable that Beddoes, pushed to desperation and believing himself to have been already betrayed, had revenged himself upon Hudson, and had fled from the country with as much money as he could lay his hands on. ⁴⁰⁸Those are the facts of the case, Doctor, and if they are of any use to your collection, I am sure that they are very heartily at your service."

The Musgrave Ritual

¹An anomaly which often struck me in the character of my friend Sherlock Holmes was that, although in his methods of thought he was the neatest and most methodical of mankind, and although also he affected a certain quiet primness of dress, he was none the less in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction. ²Not that I am in the least conventional in that respect myself. ³The rough-and-tumble work in Afghanistan, coming on the top of a natural Bohemianism of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man. ⁴But with me there is a limit, and when I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs. ⁵I have always held, too, that pistol practice should be distinctly an open-air pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humors, would sit in an arm-chair with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it.

⁶Our chambers were always full of chemicals and of criminal relics which had a way of wandering into unlikely positions, and of turning up in the butter-dish or in even less desirable places. ⁷But his papers were my great crux. ⁸He had a horror of destroying documents, especially those which were connected with his past cases, and yet it was only once in every year or two that he would muster energy to docket and arrange them; for, as I have mentioned somewhere in these incoherent memoirs, the outbursts of passionate energy when he performed the remarkable feats with which his name is associated were followed by reactions of lethargy during which he would lie about with his violin and his books, hardly moving save from the sofa to the table. ⁹Thus month after month his papers accumulated, until every corner of the room was stacked with bundles of manuscript which were on no account to be burned, and which could not be put away save by their owner. ¹⁰One winter's night, as we sat together by the fire, I ventured to suggest to him that, as he had finished pasting extracts into his common-place book, he might employ the next two hours in making our room a little more habitable. ¹¹He could not deny the justice of my request, so with a rather rueful face he went off to his bedroom, from which he returned presently pulling a large tin box behind him. ¹²This he placed in the middle of the floor and, squatting down upon a stool in front of it, he threw back the lid. ¹³I could see that it was already a third full of bundles of paper tied up with red tape into separate packages.

¹⁴"There are cases enough here, Watson," said he, looking at me with mischievous eyes. ¹⁵"I think that if you knew all that I had in this box you would ask me to pull some out instead of putting others in."

¹⁶"These are the records of your early work, then?" I asked. ¹⁷"I have often wished that I had notes of those cases."

¹⁸"Yes, my boy, these were all done prematurely before my biographer had come to glorify me." ¹⁹He lifted bundle after bundle in a tender, caressing sort of way. ²⁰"They are not all successes, Watson," said he. ²¹"But there are some pretty little problems among them. ²²Here's the record of the Tarleton murders, and the case of Vamberry, the wine merchant, and the adventure of the old Russian woman, and the singular affair of the aluminium crutch, as well as a full account of Ricoletti of the club-foot, and his abominable wife. ²³And here—ah, now, this really is something a little *recherché*."

²⁴He dived his arm down to the bottom of the chest, and brought up a small wooden box with a sliding lid, such as children's toys are kept in. ²⁵From within he produced a crumpled piece of paper, an old-fashioned brass key, a peg of wood with a ball of string attached to it, and three rusty old disks of metal.

²⁶"Well, my boy, what do you make of this lot?" he asked, smiling at my expression.

²⁷“It is a curious collection.”

²⁸“Very curious, and the story that hangs round it will strike you as being more curious still.”

²⁹“These relics have a history then?”

³⁰“So much so that they are history.”

³¹“What do you mean by that?”

³²Sherlock Holmes picked them up one by one, and laid them along the edge of the table. ³³Then he reseated himself in his chair and looked them over with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

³⁴“These,” said he, “are all that I have left to remind me of the adventure of the Musgrave Ritual.”

³⁵I had heard him mention the case more than once, though I had never been able to gather the details.

³⁶“I should be so glad,” said I, “if you would give me an account of it.”

³⁷“And leave the litter as it is?” he cried, mischievously. ³⁸“Your tidiness won't bear much strain after all, Watson. ³⁹But I should be glad that you should add this case to your annals, for there are points in it which make it quite unique in the criminal records of this or, I believe, of any other country. ⁴⁰A collection of my trifling achievements would certainly be incomplete which contained no account of this very singular business.

⁴¹“You may remember how the affair of the Gloria Scott, and my conversation with the unhappy man whose fate I told you of, first turned my attention in the direction of the profession which has become my life's work. ⁴²You see me now when my name has become known far and wide, and when I am generally recognized both by the public and by the official force as being a final court of appeal in doubtful cases. ⁴³Even when you knew me first, at the time of the affair which you have commemorated in ‘A Study in Scarlet,’ I had already established a considerable, though not a very lucrative, connection. ⁴⁴You can hardly realize, then, how difficult I found it at first, and how long I had to wait before I succeeded in making any headway.

⁴⁵“When I first came up to London I had rooms in Montague Street, just round the corner from the British Museum, and there I waited, filling in my too abundant leisure time by studying all those branches of science which might make me more efficient. ⁴⁶Now and again cases came in my way, principally through the introduction of old fellow-students, for during my last years at the University there was a good deal of talk there about myself and my methods. ⁴⁷The third of these cases was that of the Musgrave Ritual, and it is to the interest which was aroused by that singular chain of events, and the large issues which proved to be at stake, that I trace my first stride towards the position which I now hold.

⁴⁸“Reginald Musgrave had been in the same college as myself, and I had some slight acquaintance with him. ⁴⁹He was not generally popular among the undergraduates, though it always seemed to me that what was set down as pride was really an attempt to cover extreme natural diffidence. ⁵⁰In appearance he was a man of exceedingly aristocratic type, thin, high-nosed, and large-eyed, with languid and yet courtly manners. ⁵¹He was indeed a scion of one of the very oldest families in the kingdom, though his branch was a cadet one which had separated from the northern Musgraves some time in the sixteenth century, and had established itself in western Sussex, where the Manor House of Hurlstone is perhaps the oldest inhabited building in the county. ⁵²Something of his birth place seemed to cling to the man, and I never looked at his pale, keen face or the poise of his head without associating him with gray archways and mullioned windows and all the venerable wreckage of a feudal keep. ⁵³Once or twice we drifted into talk, and I can remember that more than once he expressed a keen interest in my methods of observation and inference.

⁵⁴“For four years I had seen nothing of him until one morning he walked into my room in Montague Street. ⁵⁵He had changed little, was dressed like a young man of fashion—he was always a bit of a dandy—and preserved the same quiet, suave manner which had formerly distinguished him.

⁵⁶“How has all gone with you Musgrave?’ I asked, after we had cordially shaken hands.

⁵⁷“You probably heard of my poor father’s death,’ said he; ‘he was carried off about two years ago.

⁵⁸Since then I have of course had the Hurlstone estates to manage, and as I am member for my district as well, my life has been a busy one. ⁵⁹But I understand, Holmes, that you are turning to practical ends those powers with which you used to amaze us?’

⁶⁰“Yes,’ said I, ‘I have taken to living by my wits.’

⁶¹“I am delighted to hear it, for your advice at present would be exceedingly valuable to me. ⁶²We have had some very strange doings at Hurlstone, and the police have been able to throw no light upon the matter. ⁶³It is really the most extraordinary and inexplicable business.’

⁶⁴“You can imagine with what eagerness I listened to him, Watson, for the very chance for which I had been panting during all those months of inaction seemed to have come within my reach. ⁶⁵In my inmost heart I believed that I could succeed where others failed, and now I had the opportunity to test myself.

⁶⁶“Pray, let me have the details,’ I cried.

⁶⁷“Reginald Musgrave sat down opposite to me, and lit the cigarette which I had pushed towards him.

⁶⁸“You must know,’ said he, ‘that though I am a bachelor, I have to keep up a considerable staff of servants at Hurlstone, for it is a rambling old place, and takes a good deal of looking after. ⁶⁹I preserve, too, and in the pheasant months I usually have a house-party, so that it would not do to be short-handed. ⁷⁰Altogether there are eight maids, the cook, the butler, two footmen, and a boy. ⁷¹The garden and the stables of course have a separate staff.

⁷²“Of these servants the one who had been longest in our service was Brunton the butler. ⁷³He was a young school-master out of place when he was first taken up by my father, but he was a man of great energy and character, and he soon became quite invaluable in the household. ⁷⁴He was a well-grown, handsome man, with a splendid forehead, and though he has been with us for twenty years he cannot be more than forty now. ⁷⁵With his personal advantages and his extraordinary gifts—for he can speak several languages and play nearly every musical instrument—it is wonderful that he should have been satisfied so long in such a position, but I suppose that he was comfortable, and lacked energy to make any change. ⁷⁶The butler of Hurlstone is always a thing that is remembered by all who visit us.

⁷⁷“But this paragon has one fault. ⁷⁸He is a bit of a Don Juan, and you can imagine that for a man like him it is not a very difficult part to play in a quiet country district. ⁷⁹When he was married it was all right, but since he has been a widower we have had no end of trouble with him. ⁸⁰A few months ago we were in hopes that he was about to settle down again for he became engaged to Rachel Howells, our second house-maid; but he has thrown her over since then and taken up with Janet Tregellis, the daughter of the head game-keeper. ⁸¹Rachel—who is a very good girl, but of an excitable Welsh temperament—had a sharp touch of brain-fever, and goes about the house now—or did until yesterday—like a black-eyed shadow of her former self. ⁸²That was our first drama at Hurlstone; but a second one came to drive it from our minds, and it was prefaced by the disgrace and dismissal of butler Brunton.

⁸³“This was how it came about. ⁸⁴I have said that the man was intelligent, and this very intelligence has caused his ruin, for it seems to have led to an insatiable curiosity about things which did not in the least concern him. ⁸⁵I had no idea of the lengths to which this would carry him, until the merest accident opened my eyes to it.

⁸⁶“I have said that the house is a rambling one. ⁸⁷One day last week—on Thursday night, to be more exact—I found that I could not sleep, having foolishly taken a cup of strong café noir after my dinner. ⁸⁸After struggling against it until two in the morning, I felt that it was quite hopeless, so I rose and lit the candle with the intention of continuing a novel which I was reading. ⁸⁹The book, however, had been left in the billiard-room, so I pulled on my dressing-gown and started off to get it.

⁹⁰“In order to reach the billiard-room I had to descend a flight of stairs and then to cross the head of a passage which led to the library and the gun-room. ⁹¹You can imagine my surprise when, as I looked down this corridor, I saw a glimmer of light coming from the open door of the library. ⁹²I had myself extinguished the lamp and closed the door before coming to bed. ⁹³Naturally my first thought was of burglars. ⁹⁴The corridors at Hurlstone have their walls largely decorated with trophies of old weapons. ⁹⁵From one of these I picked a battle-axe, and then, leaving my candle behind me, I crept on tiptoe down the passage and peeped in at the open door.

⁹⁶“Brunton, the butler, was in the library. ⁹⁷He was sitting, fully dressed, in an easy-chair, with a slip of paper which looked like a map upon his knee, and his forehead sunk forward upon his hand in deep thought. ⁹⁸I stood dumb with astonishment, watching him from the darkness. ⁹⁹A small taper on the edge of the table shed a feeble light which sufficed to show me that he was fully dressed. ¹⁰⁰Suddenly, as I looked, he rose from his chair, and walking over to a bureau at the side, he unlocked it and drew out one of the drawers. ¹⁰¹From this he took a paper, and returning to his seat he flattened it out beside the taper on the edge of the table, and began to study it with minute attention. ¹⁰²My indignation at this calm examination of our family documents overcame me so far that I took a step forward, and Brunton, looking up, saw me standing in the doorway. ¹⁰³He sprang to his feet, his face turned livid with fear, and he thrust into his breast the chart-like paper which he had been originally studying.

¹⁰⁴““So!” said I. ¹⁰⁵“This is how you repay the trust which we have reposed in you. ¹⁰⁶You will leave my service to-morrow.”

¹⁰⁷“He bowed with the look of a man who is utterly crushed, and slunk past me without a word. ¹⁰⁸The taper was still on the table, and by its light I glanced to see what the paper was which Brunton had taken from the bureau. ¹⁰⁹To my surprise it was nothing of any importance at all, but simply a copy of the questions and answers in the singular old observance called the Musgrave Ritual. ¹¹⁰It is a sort of ceremony peculiar to our family, which each Musgrave for centuries past has gone through on his coming of age—a thing of private interest, and perhaps of some little importance to the archaeologist, like our own blazonings and charges, but of no practical use whatever.’

¹¹¹““We had better come back to the paper afterwards,’ said I.

¹¹²““If you think it really necessary,’ he answered, with some hesitation. ¹¹³“To continue my statement, however: I relocked the bureau, using the key which Brunton had left, and I had turned to go when I was surprised to find that the butler had returned, and was standing before me.

¹¹⁴““Mr. Musgrave, sir,” he cried, in a voice which was hoarse with emotion, “I can’t bear disgrace, sir. ¹¹⁵I’ve always been proud above my station in life, and disgrace would kill me. ¹¹⁶My blood will be on your head, sir—it will, indeed—if you drive me to despair. ¹¹⁷If you cannot keep me after what has passed, then for God’s sake let me give you notice and leave in a month, as if of my own free will. ¹¹⁸I could stand that, Mr. Musgrave, but not to be cast out before all the folk that I know so well.”

¹¹⁹““You don’t deserve much consideration, Brunton,” I answered. ¹²⁰“Your conduct has been most infamous. ¹²¹However, as you have been a long time in the family, I have no wish to bring public disgrace upon you. ¹²²A month, however is too long. ¹²³Take yourself away in a week, and give what reason you like for going.”

¹²⁴““Only a week, sir?” he cried, in a despairing voice. ¹²⁵“A fortnight—say at least a fortnight!”

¹²⁶““A week,” I repeated, “and you may consider yourself to have been very leniently dealt with.”

¹²⁷“He crept away, his face sunk upon his breast, like a broken man, while I put out the light and returned to my room.

¹²⁸“For two days after this Brunton was most assiduous in his attention to his duties. ¹²⁹I made no allusion to what had passed, and waited with some curiosity to see how he would cover his disgrace.

¹³⁰On the third morning, however he did not appear, as was his custom, after breakfast to receive my instructions for the day. ¹³¹As I left the dining-room I happened to meet Rachel Howells, the maid. ¹³²I have told you that she had only recently recovered from an illness, and was looking so wretchedly pale and wan that I remonstrated with her for being at work.

¹³³““You should be in bed,” I said. ¹³⁴“Come back to your duties when you are stronger.”

¹³⁵“She looked at me with so strange an expression that I began to suspect that her brain was affected.

¹³⁶““I am strong enough, Mr. Musgrave,” said she.

¹³⁷““We will see what the doctor says,” I answered. ¹³⁸“You must stop work now, and when you go downstairs just say that I wish to see Brunton.”

¹³⁹““The butler is gone,” said she.

¹⁴⁰““Gone! ¹⁴¹Gone where?”

¹⁴²““He is gone. ¹⁴³No one has seen him. ¹⁴⁴He is not in his room. ¹⁴⁵Oh, yes, he is gone, he is gone!” ¹⁴⁶She fell back against the wall with shriek after shriek of laughter, while I, horrified at this sudden hysterical attack, rushed to the bell to summon help. ¹⁴⁷The girl was taken to her room, still screaming and sobbing, while I made inquiries about Brunton. ¹⁴⁸There was no doubt about it that he had disappeared. ¹⁴⁹His bed had not been slept in, he had been seen by no one since he had retired to his room the night before, and yet it was difficult to see how he could have left the house, as both windows and doors were found to be fastened in the morning. ¹⁵⁰His clothes, his watch, and even his money were in his room, but the black suit which he usually wore was missing. ¹⁵¹His slippers, too, were gone, but his boots were left behind. ¹⁵²Where then could butler Brunton have gone in the night, and what could have become of him now?

¹⁵³““Of course we searched the house from cellar to garret, but there was no trace of him. ¹⁵⁴It is, as I have said, a labyrinth of an old house, especially the original wing, which is now practically uninhabited; but we ransacked every room and cellar without discovering the least sign of the missing man. ¹⁵⁵It was incredible to me that he could have gone away leaving all his property behind him, and yet where could he be? ¹⁵⁶I called in the local police, but without success. ¹⁵⁷Rain had fallen on the night before and we examined the lawn and the paths all round the house, but in vain. ¹⁵⁸Matters were in this state, when a new development quite drew our attention away from the original mystery.

¹⁵⁹““For two days Rachel Howells had been so ill, sometimes delirious, sometimes hysterical, that a nurse had been employed to sit up with her at night. ¹⁶⁰On the third night after Brunton's disappearance, the nurse, finding her patient sleeping nicely, had dropped into a nap in the arm-chair, when she woke in the early morning to find the bed empty, the window open, and no signs of the invalid. ¹⁶¹I was instantly aroused, and, with the two footmen, started off at once in search of the missing girl. ¹⁶²It was not difficult to tell the direction which she had taken, for, starting from under her window, we could follow her footmarks easily across the lawn to the edge of the mere, where they vanished close to the gravel path which leads out of the grounds. ¹⁶³The lake there is eight feet deep, and you can imagine our feelings when we saw that the trail of the poor demented girl came to an end at the edge of it.

¹⁶⁴““Of course, we had the drags at once, and set to work to recover the remains, but no trace of the body could we find. ¹⁶⁵On the other hand, we brought to the surface an object of a most unexpected

kind. ¹⁶⁶It was a linen bag which contained within it a mass of old rusted and discolored metal and several dull-colored pieces of pebble or glass. ¹⁶⁷This strange find was all that we could get from the mere, and, although we made every possible search and inquiry yesterday, we know nothing of the fate either of Rachel Howells or of Richard Brunton. ¹⁶⁸The county police are at their wits' end, and I have come up to you as a last resource.'

¹⁶⁹"You can imagine, Watson, with what eagerness I listened to this extraordinary sequence of events, and endeavored to piece them together, and to devise some common thread upon which they might all hang. ¹⁷⁰The butler was gone. ¹⁷¹The maid was gone. ¹⁷²The maid had loved the butler, but had afterwards had cause to hate him. ¹⁷³She was of Welsh blood, fiery and passionate. ¹⁷⁴She had been terribly excited immediately after his disappearance. ¹⁷⁵She had flung into the lake a bag containing some curious contents. ¹⁷⁶These were all factors which had to be taken into consideration, and yet none of them got quite to the heart of the matter. ¹⁷⁷What was the starting-point of this chain of events? ¹⁷⁸There lay the end of this tangled line.

¹⁷⁹"I must see that paper, Musgrave,' said I, 'which this butler of your thought it worth his while to consult, even at the risk of the loss of his place.'

¹⁸⁰"It is rather an absurd business, this ritual of ours,' he answered. ¹⁸¹'But it has at least the saving grace of antiquity to excuse it. ¹⁸²I have a copy of the questions and answers here if you care to run your eye over them.'

¹⁸³"He handed me the very paper which I have here, Watson, and this is the strange catechism to which each Musgrave had to submit when he came to man's estate. ¹⁸⁴I will read you the questions and answers as they stand.

¹⁸⁵"Whose was it?'

¹⁸⁶"His who is gone.'

¹⁸⁷"Who shall have it?'

¹⁸⁸"He who will come.'

¹⁸⁹"What was the month?'

¹⁹⁰"The sixth from the first.'

¹⁹¹"Where was the sun?'

¹⁹²"Over the oak.'

¹⁹³"Where was the shadow?'

¹⁹⁴"Under the elm.'

¹⁹⁵"How was it stepped?'

¹⁹⁶"North by ten and by ten, east by five and by five, south by two and by two, west by one and by one, and so under.'

¹⁹⁷"What shall we give for it?'

¹⁹⁸"All that is ours.'

¹⁹⁹"Why should we give it?'

²⁰⁰"For the sake of the trust.'

²⁰¹“The original has no date, but is in the spelling of the middle of the seventeenth century,” remarked Musgrave. ²⁰²“I am afraid, however, that it can be of little help to you in solving this mystery.”

²⁰³“At least,” said I, “it gives us another mystery, and one which is even more interesting than the first.

²⁰⁴It may be that the solution of the one may prove to be the solution of the other. ²⁰⁵You will excuse me, Musgrave, if I say that your butler appears to me to have been a very clever man, and to have had a clearer insight than ten generations of his masters.”

²⁰⁶“I hardly follow you,” said Musgrave. ²⁰⁷“The paper seems to me to be of no practical importance.”

²⁰⁸“But to me it seems immensely practical, and I fancy that Brunton took the same view. ²⁰⁹He had probably seen it before that night on which you caught him.”

²¹⁰“It is very possible. ²¹¹We took no pains to hide it.”

²¹²“He simply wished, I should imagine, to refresh his memory upon that last occasion. ²¹³He had, as I understand, some sort of map or chart which he was comparing with the manuscript, and which he thrust into his pocket when you appeared.”

²¹⁴“That is true. ²¹⁵But what could he have to do with this old family custom of ours, and what does this rigmarole mean?”

²¹⁶“I don’t think that we should have much difficulty in determining that,” said I; “with your permission we will take the first train down to Sussex, and go a little more deeply into the matter upon the spot.”

²¹⁷“The same afternoon saw us both at Hurlstone. ²¹⁸Possibly you have seen pictures and read descriptions of the famous old building, so I will confine my account of it to saying that it is built in the shape of an L, the long arm being the more modern portion, and the shorter the ancient nucleus, from which the other had developed. ²¹⁹Over the low, heavily-lintelled door, in the centre of this old part, is chiseled the date, 1607, but experts are agreed that the beams and stone-work are really much older than this. ²²⁰The enormously thick walls and tiny windows of this part had in the last century driven the family into building the new wing, and the old one was used now as a store-house and a cellar, when it was used at all. ²²¹A splendid park with fine old timber surrounds the house, and the lake, to which my client had referred, lay close to the avenue, about two hundred yards from the building.

²²²“I was already firmly convinced, Watson, that there were not three separate mysteries here, but one only, and that if I could read the Musgrave Ritual aright I should hold in my hand the clue which would lead me to the truth concerning both the butler Brunton and the maid Howells. ²²³To that then I turned all my energies. ²²⁴Why should this servant be so anxious to master this old formula? ²²⁵Evidently because he saw something in it which had escaped all those generations of country squires, and from which he expected some personal advantage. ²²⁶What was it then, and how had it affected his fate?

²²⁷“It was perfectly obvious to me, on reading the ritual, that the measurements must refer to some spot to which the rest of the document alluded, and that if we could find that spot, we should be in a fair way towards finding what the secret was which the old Musgraves had thought it necessary to embalm in so curious a fashion. ²²⁸There were two guides given us to start with, an oak and an elm. ²²⁹As to the oak there could be no question at all. ²³⁰Right in front of the house, upon the left-hand side of the drive, there stood a patriarch among oaks, one of the most magnificent trees that I have ever seen.

²³¹“That was there when your ritual was drawn up,” said I, as we drove past it.

²³²“It was there at the Norman Conquest in all probability,” he answered. ²³³“It has a girth of twenty-three feet.”

²³⁴“Here was one of my fixed points secured.

²³⁵“Have you any old elms?’ I asked.

²³⁶“There used to be a very old one over yonder but it was struck by lightning ten years ago, and we cut down the stump,’

²³⁷“You can see where it used to be?’

²³⁸“Oh, yes.’

²³⁹“There are no other elms?’

²⁴⁰“No old ones, but plenty of beeches.’

²⁴¹“I should like to see where it grew.’

²⁴²“We had driven up in a dogcart, and my client led me away at once, without our entering the house, to the scar on the lawn where the elm had stood. ²⁴³It was nearly midway between the oak and the house.

²⁴⁴My investigation seemed to be progressing.

²⁴⁵“I suppose it is impossible to find out how high the elm was?’ I asked.

²⁴⁶“I can give you it at once. ²⁴⁷It was sixty-four feet.’

²⁴⁸“How do you come to know it?’ I asked, in surprise.

²⁴⁹“When my old tutor used to give me an exercise in trigonometry, it always took the shape of measuring heights. ²⁵⁰When I was a lad I worked out every tree and building in the estate.’

²⁵¹“This was an unexpected piece of luck. ²⁵²My data were coming more quickly than I could have reasonably hoped.

²⁵³“Tell me,’ I asked, ‘did your butler ever ask you such a question?’

²⁵⁴“Reginald Musgrave looked at me in astonishment. ²⁵⁵‘Now that you call it to my mind,’ he answered, ‘Brunton did ask me about the height of the tree some months ago, in connection with some little argument with the groom.’

²⁵⁶“This was excellent news, Watson, for it showed me that I was on the right road. ²⁵⁷I looked up at the sun. ²⁵⁸It was low in the heavens, and I calculated that in less than an hour it would lie just above the topmost branches of the old oak. ²⁵⁹One condition mentioned in the Ritual would then be fulfilled.

²⁶⁰And the shadow of the elm must mean the farther end of the shadow, otherwise the trunk would have been chosen as the guide. ²⁶¹I had, then, to find where the far end of the shadow would fall when the sun was just clear of the oak.”

²⁶²“That must have been difficult, Holmes, when the elm was no longer there.”

²⁶³“Well, at least I knew that if Brunton could do it, I could also. ²⁶⁴Besides, there was no real difficulty.

²⁶⁵I went with Musgrave to his study and whittled myself this peg, to which I tied this long string with a knot at each yard. ²⁶⁶Then I took two lengths of a fishing-rod, which came to just six feet, and I went back with my client to where the elm had been. ²⁶⁷The sun was just grazing the top of the oak. ²⁶⁸I fastened the rod on end, marked out the direction of the shadow, and measured it. ²⁶⁹It was nine feet in length.

²⁷⁰“Of course the calculation now was a simple one. ²⁷¹If a rod of six feet threw a shadow of nine, a tree of sixty-four feet would throw one of ninety-six, and the line of the one would of course be the line of the other. ²⁷²I measured out the distance, which brought me almost to the wall of the house, and I thrust a peg into the spot. ²⁷³You can imagine my exultation, Watson, when within two inches of my peg I

saw a conical depression in the ground. ²⁷⁴I knew that it was the mark made by Brunton in his measurements, and that I was still upon his trail.

²⁷⁵“From this starting-point I proceeded to step, having first taken the cardinal points by my pocket-compass. ²⁷⁶Ten steps with each foot took me along parallel with the wall of the house, and again I marked my spot with a peg. ²⁷⁷Then I carefully paced off five to the east and two to the south. ²⁷⁸It brought me to the very threshold of the old door. ²⁷⁹Two steps to the west meant now that I was to go two paces down the stone-flagged passage, and this was the place indicated by the Ritual.

²⁸⁰“Never have I felt such a cold chill of disappointment, Watson. ²⁸¹For a moment it seemed to me that there must be some radical mistake in my calculations. ²⁸²The setting sun shone full upon the passage floor, and I could see that the old, foot-worn gray stones with which it was paved were firmly cemented together, and had certainly not been moved for many a long year. ²⁸³Brunton had not been at work here. ²⁸⁴I tapped upon the floor, but it sounded the same all over, and there was no sign of any crack or crevice. ²⁸⁵But fortunately, Musgrave, who had begun to appreciate the meaning of my proceedings, and who was now as excited as myself, took out his manuscript to check my calculation.

²⁸⁶“‘And under,’ he cried. ²⁸⁷‘You have omitted the “and under.”’

²⁸⁸“I had thought that it meant that we were to dig, but now, of course, I saw at once that I was wrong. ²⁸⁹‘There is a cellar under this then?’ I cried.

²⁹⁰“‘Yes, and as old as the house. ²⁹¹Down here, through this door.’

²⁹²“We went down a winding stone stair, and my companion, striking a match, lit a large lantern which stood on a barrel in the corner. ²⁹³In an instant it was obvious that we had at last come upon the true place, and that we had not been the only people to visit the spot recently.

²⁹⁴“It had been used for the storage of wood, but the billets, which had evidently been littered over the floor, were now piled at the sides, so as to leave a clear space in the middle. ²⁹⁵In this space lay a large and heavy flagstone with a rusted iron ring in the centre to which a thick shepherd's-check muffler was attached.

²⁹⁶“‘By Jove!’ cried my client. ²⁹⁷‘That's Brunton's muffler. ²⁹⁸I have seen it on him, and could swear to it. ²⁹⁹What has the villain been doing here?’

³⁰⁰“At my suggestion a couple of the county police were summoned to be present, and I then endeavored to raise the stone by pulling on the cravat. ³⁰¹I could only move it slightly, and it was with the aid of one of the constables that I succeeded at last in carrying it to one side. ³⁰²A black hole yawned beneath into which we all peered, while Musgrave, kneeling at the side, pushed down the lantern.

³⁰³“A small chamber about seven feet deep and four feet square lay open to us. ³⁰⁴At one side of this was a squat, brass-bound wooden box, the lid of which was hinged upwards, with this curious old-fashioned key projecting from the lock. ³⁰⁵It was furred outside by a thick layer of dust, and damp and worms had eaten through the wood, so that a crop of livid fungi was growing on the inside of it. ³⁰⁶Several discs of metal, old coins apparently, such as I hold here, were scattered over the bottom of the box, but it contained nothing else.

³⁰⁷“At the moment, however, we had no thought for the old chest, for our eyes were riveted upon that which crouched beside it. ³⁰⁸It was the figure of a man, clad in a suit of black, who squatted down upon his hams with his forehead sunk upon the edge of the box and his two arms thrown out on each side of it. ³⁰⁹The attitude had drawn all the stagnant blood to the face, and no man could have recognized that distorted liver-colored countenance; but his height, his dress, and his hair were all sufficient to show my client, when we had drawn the body up, that it was indeed his missing butler. ³¹⁰He had been dead some days, but there was no wound or bruise upon his person to show how he had met his dreadful end.

³¹¹When his body had been carried from the cellar we found ourselves still confronted with a problem which was almost as formidable as that with which we had started.

³¹²"I confess that so far, Watson, I had been disappointed in my investigation. ³¹³I had reckoned upon solving the matter when once I had found the place referred to in the Ritual; but now I was there, and was apparently as far as ever from knowing what it was which the family had concealed with such elaborate precautions. ³¹⁴It is true that I had thrown a light upon the fate of Brunton, but now I had to ascertain how that fate had come upon him, and what part had been played in the matter by the woman who had disappeared. ³¹⁵I sat down upon a keg in the corner and thought the whole matter carefully over.

³¹⁶"You know my methods in such cases, Watson. ³¹⁷I put myself in the man's place and, having first gauged his intelligence, I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances. ³¹⁸In this case the matter was simplified by Brunton's intelligence being quite first-rate, so that it was unnecessary to make any allowance for the personal equation, as the astronomers have dubbed it. ³¹⁹He knew that something valuable was concealed. ³²⁰He had spotted the place. ³²¹He found that the stone which covered it was just too heavy for a man to move unaided. ³²²What would he do next? ³²³He could not get help from outside, even if he had some one whom he could trust, without the unbarring of doors and considerable risk of detection. ³²⁴It was better, if he could, to have his helpmate inside the house. ³²⁵But whom could he ask? ³²⁶This girl had been devoted to him. ³²⁷A man always finds it hard to realize that he may have finally lost a woman's love, however badly he may have treated her. ³²⁸He would try by a few attentions to make his peace with the girl Howells, and then would engage her as his accomplice. ³²⁹Together they would come at night to the cellar, and their united force would suffice to raise the stone. ³³⁰So far I could follow their actions as if I had actually seen them.

³³¹"But for two of them, and one a woman, it must have been heavy work the raising of that stone. ³³²A burly Sussex policeman and I had found it no light job. ³³³What would they do to assist them? ³³⁴Probably what I should have done myself. ³³⁵I rose and examined carefully the different billets of wood which were scattered round the floor. ³³⁶Almost at once I came upon what I expected. ³³⁷One piece, about three feet in length, had a very marked indentation at one end, while several were flattened at the sides as if they had been compressed by some considerable weight. ³³⁸Evidently, as they had dragged the stone up they had thrust the chunks of wood into the chink, until at last, when the opening was large enough to crawl through, they would hold it open by a billet placed lengthwise, which might very well become indented at the lower end, since the whole weight of the stone would press it down on to the edge of this other slab. ³³⁹So far I was still on safe ground.

³⁴⁰"And now how was I to proceed to reconstruct this midnight drama? ³⁴¹Clearly, only one could fit into the hole, and that one was Brunton. ³⁴²The girl must have waited above. ³⁴³Brunton then unlocked the box, handed up the contents presumably—since they were not to be found—and then—and then what happened?

³⁴⁴"What smouldering fire of vengeance had suddenly sprung into flame in this passionate Celtic woman's soul when she saw the man who had wronged her—wronged her, perhaps, far more than we suspected—in her power? ³⁴⁵Was it a chance that the wood had slipped, and that the stone had shut Brunton into what had become his sepulchre? ³⁴⁶Had she only been guilty of silence as to his fate? ³⁴⁷Or had some sudden blow from her hand dashed the support away and sent the slab crashing down into its place? ³⁴⁸Be that as it might, I seemed to see that woman's figure still clutching at her treasure trove and flying wildly up the winding stair, with her ears ringing perhaps with the muffled screams from behind her and with the drumming of frenzied hands against the slab of stone which was choking her faithless lover's life out.

³⁴⁹"Here was the secret of her blanched face, her shaken nerves, her peals of hysterical laughter on the next morning. ³⁵⁰But what had been in the box? ³⁵¹What had she done with that? ³⁵²Of course, it must

have been the old metal and pebbles which my client had dragged from the mere. ³⁵³She had thrown them in there at the first opportunity to remove the last trace of her crime.

³⁵⁴“For twenty minutes I had sat motionless, thinking the matter out. ³⁵⁵Musgrave still stood with a very pale face, swinging his lantern and peering down into the hole.

³⁵⁶“These are coins of Charles the First,” said he, holding out the few which had been in the box; ‘you see we were right in fixing our date for the Ritual.’

³⁵⁷“We may find something else of Charles the First,” I cried, as the probable meaning of the first two question of the Ritual broke suddenly upon me. ³⁵⁸“Let me see the contents of the bag which you fished from the mere.’

³⁵⁹“We ascended to his study, and he laid the debris before me. ³⁶⁰I could understand his regarding it as of small importance when I looked at it, for the metal was almost black and the stones lustreless and dull. ³⁶¹I rubbed one of them on my sleeve, however, and it glowed afterwards like a spark in the dark hollow of my hand. ³⁶²The metal work was in the form of a double ring, but it had been bent and twisted out of its original shape.

³⁶³“You must bear in mind,” said I, ‘that the royal party made head in England even after the death of the King, and that when they at last fled they probably left many of their most precious possessions buried behind them, with the intention of returning for them in more peaceful times.’

³⁶⁴“My ancestor, Sir Ralph Musgrave, was a prominent Cavalier and the right-hand man of Charles the Second in his wanderings,’ said my friend.

³⁶⁵“Ah, indeed!” I answered. ³⁶⁶“Well now, I think that really should give us the last link that we wanted.

³⁶⁷I must congratulate you on coming into the possession, though in rather a tragic manner, of a relic which is of great intrinsic value, but of even greater importance as an historical curiosity.’

³⁶⁸“What is it, then?” he gasped in astonishment.

³⁶⁹“It is nothing less than the ancient crown of the kings of England.’

³⁷⁰“The crown!’

³⁷¹“Precisely. ³⁷²Consider what the Ritual says: ³⁷³How does it run? ³⁷⁴“Whose was it?” ³⁷⁵“His who is gone.” ³⁷⁶That was after the execution of Charles. ³⁷⁷Then, “Who shall have it?” ³⁷⁸“He who will come.”

³⁷⁹That was Charles the Second, whose advent was already foreseen. ³⁸⁰There can, I think, be no doubt that this battered and shapeless diadem once encircled the brows of the royal Stuarts.’

³⁸¹“And how came it in the pond?”

³⁸²“Ah, that is a question that will take some time to answer.’ ³⁸³And with that I sketched out to him the whole long chain of surmise and of proof which I had constructed. ³⁸⁴The twilight had closed in and the moon was shining brightly in the sky before my narrative was finished.

³⁸⁵“And how was it then that Charles did not get his crown when he returned?” asked Musgrave, pushing back the relic into its linen bag.

³⁸⁶“Ah, there you lay your finger upon the one point which we shall probably never be able to clear up.

³⁸⁷It is likely that the Musgrave who held the secret died in the interval, and by some oversight left this guide to his descendant without explaining the meaning of it. ³⁸⁸From that day to this it has been handed down from father to son, until at last it came within reach of a man who tore its secret out of it and lost his life in the venture.’

³⁸⁹“And that's the story of the Musgrave Ritual, Watson. ³⁹⁰They have the crown down at Hurlstone—though they had some legal bother and a considerable sum to pay before they were allowed to retain it. ³⁹¹I am sure that if you mentioned my name they would be happy to show it to you. ³⁹²Of the woman nothing was ever heard, and the probability is that she got away out of England and carried herself and the memory of her crime to some land beyond the seas.”

The Reigate Squires

¹It was some time before the health of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes recovered from the strain caused by his immense exertions in the spring of '87. ²The whole question of the Netherland-Sumatra Company and of the colossal schemes of Baron Maupertuis are too recent in the minds of the public, and are too intimately concerned with politics and finance to be fitting subjects for this series of sketches. ³They led, however, in an indirect fashion to a singular and complex problem which gave my friend an opportunity of demonstrating the value of a fresh weapon among the many with which he waged his life-long battle against crime.

⁴On referring to my notes I see that it was upon the 14th of April that I received a telegram from Lyons which informed me that Holmes was lying ill in the Hotel Dulong. ⁵Within twenty-four hours I was in his sick-room, and was relieved to find that there was nothing formidable in his symptoms. ⁶Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months, during which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day, and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch. ⁷Even the triumphant issue of his labors could not save him from reaction after so terrible an exertion, and at a time when Europe was ringing with his name and when his room was literally ankle-deep with congratulatory telegrams I found him a prey to the blackest depression. ⁸Even the knowledge that he had succeeded where the police of three countries had failed, and that he had outmanoeuvred at every point the most accomplished swindler in Europe, was insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration.

⁹Three days later we were back in Baker Street together; but it was evident that my friend would be much the better for a change, and the thought of a week of spring time in the country was full of attractions to me also. ¹⁰My old friend, Colonel Hayter, who had come under my professional care in Afghanistan, had now taken a house near Reigate in Surrey, and had frequently asked me to come down to him upon a visit. ¹¹On the last occasion he had remarked that if my friend would only come with me he would be glad to extend his hospitality to him also. ¹²A little diplomacy was needed, but when Holmes understood that the establishment was a bachelor one, and that he would be allowed the fullest freedom, he fell in with my plans and a week after our return from Lyons we were under the Colonel's roof. ¹³Hayter was a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world, and he soon found, as I had expected, that Holmes and he had much in common.

¹⁴On the evening of our arrival we were sitting in the Colonel's gun-room after dinner, Holmes stretched upon the sofa, while Hayter and I looked over his little armory of Eastern weapons.

¹⁵"By the way," said he suddenly, "I think I'll take one of these pistols upstairs with me in case we have an alarm."

¹⁶"An alarm!" said I.

¹⁷"Yes, we've had a scare in this part lately. ¹⁸Old Acton, who is one of our county magnates, had his house broken into last Monday. ¹⁹No great damage done, but the fellows are still at large."

²⁰"No clue?" asked Holmes, cocking his eye at the Colonel.

²¹"None as yet. ²²But the affair is a pretty one, one of our little country crimes, which must seem too small for your attention, Mr. Holmes, after this great international affair."

²³Holmes waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him.

²⁴"Was there any feature of interest?"

²⁵“I fancy not. ²⁶The thieves ransacked the library and got very little for their pains. ²⁷The whole place was turned upside down, drawers burst open, and presses ransacked, with the result that an odd volume of Pope's Homer, two plated candlesticks, an ivory letter-weight, a small oak barometer, and a ball of twine are all that have vanished.”

²⁸“What an extraordinary assortment!” I exclaimed.

²⁹“Oh, the fellows evidently grabbed hold of everything they could get.”

³⁰Holmes grunted from the sofa.

³¹“The county police ought to make something of that,” said he; “why, it is surely obvious that—”

³²But I held up a warning finger.

³³“You are here for a rest, my dear fellow. ³⁴For Heaven's sake don't get started on a new problem when your nerves are all in shreds.”

³⁵Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a glance of comic resignation towards the Colonel, and the talk drifted away into less dangerous channels.

³⁶It was destined, however, that all my professional caution should be wasted, for next morning the problem obtruded itself upon us in such a way that it was impossible to ignore it, and our country visit took a turn which neither of us could have anticipated. ³⁷We were at breakfast when the Colonel's butler rushed in with all his propriety shaken out of him.

³⁸“Have you heard the news, sir?” he gasped. ³⁹“At the Cunningham's sir!”

⁴⁰“Burglary!” cried the Colonel, with his coffee-cup in mid-air.

⁴¹“Murder!”

⁴²The Colonel whistled. ⁴³“By Jove!” said he. ⁴⁴“Who's killed, then? ⁴⁵The J.P. or his son?”

⁴⁶“Neither, sir. ⁴⁷It was William the coachman. ⁴⁸Shot through the heart, sir, and never spoke again.”

⁴⁹“Who shot him, then?”

⁵⁰“The burglar, sir. ⁵¹He was off like a shot and got clean away. ⁵²He'd just broke in at the pantry window when William came on him and met his end in saving his master's property.”

⁵³“What time?”

⁵⁴“It was last night, sir, somewhere about twelve.”

⁵⁵“Ah, then, we'll step over afterwards,” said the Colonel, coolly settling down to his breakfast again.

⁵⁶“It's a baddish business,” he added when the butler had gone; “he's our leading man about here, is old Cunningham, and a very decent fellow too. ⁵⁷He'll be cut up over this, for the man has been in his service for years and was a good servant. ⁵⁸It's evidently the same villains who broke into Acton's.”

⁵⁹“And stole that very singular collection,” said Holmes, thoughtfully.

⁶⁰“Precisely.”

⁶¹“Hum! ⁶²It may prove the simplest matter in the world, but all the same at first glance this is just a little curious, is it not? ⁶³A gang of burglars acting in the country might be expected to vary the scene of their operations, and not to crack two cribs in the same district within a few days. ⁶⁴When you spoke last night of taking precautions I remember that it passed through my mind that this was probably the

last parish in England to which the thief or thieves would be likely to turn their attention—which shows that I have still much to learn.”

⁶⁵“I fancy it's some local practitioner,” said the Colonel. ⁶⁶“In that case, of course, Acton's and Cunningham's are just the places he would go for, since they are far the largest about here.”

⁶⁷“And richest?”

⁶⁸“Well, they ought to be, but they've had a lawsuit for some years which has sucked the blood out of both of them, I fancy. ⁶⁹Old Acton has some claim on half Cunningham's estate, and the lawyers have been at it with both hands.”

⁷⁰“If it's a local villain there should not be much difficulty in running him down,” said Holmes with a yawn. ⁷¹“All right, Watson, I don't intend to meddle.”

⁷²“Inspector Forrester, sir,” said the butler, throwing open the door.

⁷³The official, a smart, keen-faced young fellow, stepped into the room. ⁷⁴“Good-morning, Colonel,” said he; “I hope I don't intrude, but we hear that Mr. Holmes of Baker Street is here.”

⁷⁵The Colonel waved his hand towards my friend, and the Inspector bowed.

⁷⁶“We thought that perhaps you would care to step across, Mr. Holmes.”

⁷⁷“The fates are against you, Watson,” said he, laughing. ⁷⁸“We were chatting about the matter when you came in, Inspector. ⁷⁹Perhaps you can let us have a few details.” ⁸⁰As he leaned back in his chair in the familiar attitude I knew that the case was hopeless.

⁸¹“We had no clue in the Acton affair. ⁸²But here we have plenty to go on, and there's no doubt it is the same party in each case. ⁸³The man was seen.”

⁸⁴“Ah!”

⁸⁵“Yes, sir. ⁸⁶But he was off like a deer after the shot that killed poor William Kirwan was fired. ⁸⁷Mr. Cunningham saw him from the bedroom window, and Mr. Alec Cunningham saw him from the back passage. ⁸⁸It was quarter to twelve when the alarm broke out. Mr. Cunningham had just got into bed, and Mr. Alec was smoking a pipe in his dressing-gown. ⁸⁹They both heard William the coachman calling for help, and Mr. Alec ran down to see what was the matter. ⁹⁰The back door was open, and as he came to the foot of the stairs he saw two men wrestling together outside. ⁹¹One of them fired a shot, the other dropped, and the murderer rushed across the garden and over the hedge. ⁹²Mr. Cunningham, looking out of his bedroom, saw the fellow as he gained the road, but lost sight of him at once. ⁹³Mr. Alec stopped to see if he could help the dying man, and so the villain got clean away. ⁹⁴Beyond the fact that he was a middle-sized man and dressed in some dark stuff, we have no personal clue; but we are making energetic inquiries, and if he is a stranger we shall soon find him out.”

⁹⁵“What was this William doing there? ⁹⁶Did he say anything before he died?”

⁹⁷“Not a word. ⁹⁸He lives at the lodge with his mother, and as he was a very faithful fellow we imagine that he walked up to the house with the intention of seeing that all was right there. ⁹⁹Of course this Acton business has put every one on their guard. ¹⁰⁰The robber must have just burst open the door—the lock has been forced—when William came upon him.”

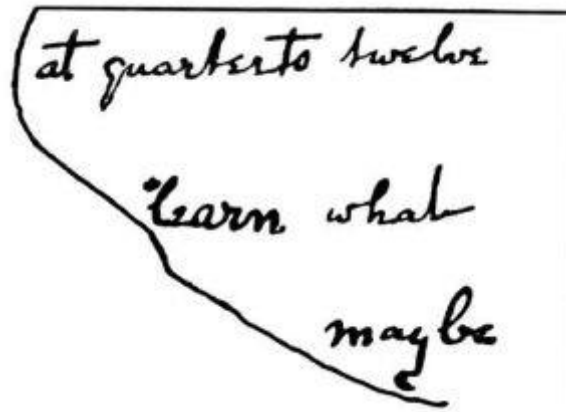
¹⁰¹“Did William say anything to his mother before going out?”

¹⁰²“She is very old and deaf, and we can get no information from her. ¹⁰³The shock has made her half-witted, but I understand that she was never very bright. ¹⁰⁴There is one very important circumstance, however. ¹⁰⁵Look at this!”

¹⁰⁶He took a small piece of torn paper from a note-book and spread it out upon his knee.

¹⁰⁷“This was found between the finger and thumb of the dead man. ¹⁰⁸It appears to be a fragment torn from a larger sheet. ¹⁰⁹You will observe that the hour mentioned upon it is the very time at which the poor fellow met his fate. ¹¹⁰You see that his murderer might have torn the rest of the sheet from him or he might have taken this fragment from the murderer. ¹¹¹It reads almost as though it were an appointment.”

¹¹²Holmes took up the scrap of paper, a facsimile of which is here reproduced.



[¹¹³at quarter to twelve learn what maybe]

¹¹⁴“Presuming that it is an appointment,” continued the Inspector, “it is of course a conceivable theory that this William Kirwan—though he had the reputation of being an honest man, may have been in league with the thief. ¹¹⁵He may have met him there, may even have helped him to break in the door, and then they may have fallen out between themselves.”

¹¹⁶“This writing is of extraordinary interest,” said Holmes, who had been examining it with intense concentration. ¹¹⁷“These are much deeper waters than I had thought.” ¹¹⁸He sank his head upon his hands, while the Inspector smiled at the effect which his case had had upon the famous London specialist.

¹¹⁹“Your last remark,” said Holmes, presently, “as to the possibility of there being an understanding between the burglar and the servant, and this being a note of appointment from one to the other, is an ingenious and not entirely impossible supposition. ¹²⁰But this writing opens up—” ¹²¹He sank his head into his hands again and remained for some minutes in the deepest thought. ¹²²When he raised his face again, I was surprised to see that his cheek was tinged with color, and his eyes as bright as before his illness. ¹²³He sprang to his feet with all his old energy.

¹²⁴“I’ll tell you what,” said he, “I should like to have a quiet little glance into the details of this case. ¹²⁵There is something in it which fascinates me extremely. ¹²⁶If you will permit me, Colonel, I will leave my friend Watson and you, and I will step round with the Inspector to test the truth of one or two little fancies of mine. ¹²⁷I will be with you again in half an hour.”

¹²⁸An hour and half had elapsed before the Inspector returned alone.

¹²⁹“Mr. Holmes is walking up and down in the field outside,” said he. ¹³⁰“He wants us all four to go up to the house together.”

¹³¹“To Mr. Cunningham’s?”

¹³²“Yes, sir.”

¹³³“What for?”

¹³⁴The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. ¹³⁵“I don't quite know, sir. ¹³⁶Between ourselves, I think Mr. Holmes had not quite got over his illness yet. ¹³⁷He's been behaving very queerly, and he is very much excited.”

¹³⁸“I don't think you need alarm yourself,” said I. ¹³⁹“I have usually found that there was method in his madness.”

¹⁴⁰“Some folks might say there was madness in his method,” muttered the Inspector. ¹⁴¹“But he's all on fire to start, Colonel, so we had best go out if you are ready.”

¹⁴²We found Holmes pacing up and down in the field, his chin sunk upon his breast, and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets.

¹⁴³“The matter grows in interest,” said he. ¹⁴⁴“Watson, your country-trip has been a distinct success. ¹⁴⁵I have had a charming morning.”

¹⁴⁶“You have been up to the scene of the crime, I understand,” said the Colonel.

¹⁴⁷“Yes; the Inspector and I have made quite a little reconnaissance together.”

¹⁴⁸“Any success?”

¹⁴⁹“Well, we have seen some very interesting things. ¹⁵⁰I'll tell you what we did as we walk. ¹⁵¹First of all, we saw the body of this unfortunate man. ¹⁵²He certainly died from a revolver wound as reported.”

¹⁵³“Had you doubted it, then?”

¹⁵⁴“Oh, it is as well to test everything. ¹⁵⁵Our inspection was not wasted. ¹⁵⁶We then had an interview with Mr. Cunningham and his son, who were able to point out the exact spot where the murderer had broken through the garden-hedge in his flight. ¹⁵⁷That was of great interest.”

¹⁵⁸“Naturally.”

¹⁵⁹“Then we had a look at this poor fellow's mother. ¹⁶⁰We could get no information from her, however, as she is very old and feeble.”

¹⁶¹“And what is the result of your investigations?”

¹⁶²“The conviction that the crime is a very peculiar one. ¹⁶³Perhaps our visit now may do something to make it less obscure. ¹⁶³I think that we are both agreed, Inspector, that the fragment of paper in the dead man's hand, bearing, as it does, the very hour of his death written upon it, is of extreme importance.”

¹⁶⁴“It should give a clue, Mr. Holmes.”

¹⁶⁵“It does give a clue. ¹⁶⁶Whoever wrote that note was the man who brought William Kirwan out of his bed at that hour. ¹⁶⁷But where is the rest of that sheet of paper?”

¹⁶⁸“I examined the ground carefully in the hope of finding it,” said the Inspector.

¹⁶⁹“It was torn out of the dead man's hand. ¹⁷⁰Why was some one so anxious to get possession of it? ¹⁷¹Because it incriminated him. ¹⁷²And what would he do with it? ¹⁷³Thrust it into his pocket, most likely, never noticing that a corner of it had been left in the grip of the corpse. ¹⁷⁴If we could get the rest of that sheet it is obvious that we should have gone a long way towards solving the mystery.”

¹⁷⁵“Yes, but how can we get at the criminal's pocket before we catch the criminal?”

¹⁷⁶“Well, well, it was worth thinking over. ¹⁷⁷Then there is another obvious point. ¹⁷⁸The note was sent to William. ¹⁷⁹The man who wrote it could not have taken it; otherwise, of course, he might have delivered his own message by word of mouth. ¹⁸⁰Who brought the note, then? ¹⁸¹Or did it come through the post?”

¹⁸²“I have made inquiries,” said the Inspector. ¹⁸³“William received a letter by the afternoon post yesterday. ¹⁸⁴The envelope was destroyed by him.”

¹⁸⁵“Excellent!” cried Holmes, clapping the Inspector on the back. ¹⁸⁶“You’ve seen the postman. ¹⁸⁷It is a pleasure to work with you. ¹⁸⁸Well, here is the lodge, and if you will come up, Colonel, I will show you the scene of the crime.”

¹⁸⁹We passed the pretty cottage where the murdered man had lived, and walked up an oak-lined avenue to the fine old Queen Anne house, which bears the date of Malplaquet upon the lintel of the door. ¹⁹⁰Holmes and the Inspector led us round it until we came to the side gate, which is separated by a stretch of garden from the hedge which lines the road. ¹⁹¹A constable was standing at the kitchen door.

¹⁹²“Throw the door open, officer,” said Holmes. ¹⁹³“Now, it was on those stairs that young Mr. Cunningham stood and saw the two men struggling just where we are. Old Mr. Cunningham was at that window—the second on the left—and he saw the fellow get away just to the left of that bush. ¹⁹⁴So did the son. ¹⁹⁵They are both sure of it on account of the bush. ¹⁹⁶Then Mr. Alec ran out and knelt beside the wounded man. ¹⁹⁷The ground is very hard, you see, and there are no marks to guide us.” ¹⁹⁸As he spoke two men came down the garden path, from round the angle of the house. ¹⁹⁹The one was an elderly man, with a strong, deep-lined, heavy-eyed face; the other a dashing young fellow, whose bright, smiling expression and showy dress were in strange contrast with the business which had brought us there.

²⁰⁰“Still at it, then?” said he to Holmes. ²⁰¹“I thought you Londoners were never at fault. ²⁰²You don’t seem to be so very quick, after all.”

²⁰³“Ah, you must give us a little time,” said Holmes good-humoredly.

²⁰⁴“You’ll want it,” said young Alec Cunningham. ²⁰⁵“Why, I don’t see that we have any clue at all.”

²⁰⁶“There’s only one,” answered the Inspector. ²⁰⁷“We thought that if we could only find— ²⁰⁸Good heavens, Mr. Holmes! ²⁰⁹What is the matter?”

²¹⁰My poor friend’s face had suddenly assumed the most dreadful expression. ²¹¹His eyes rolled upwards, his features writhed in agony, and with a suppressed groan he dropped on his face upon the ground. ²¹²Horried at the suddenness and severity of the attack, we carried him into the kitchen, where he lay back in a large chair, and breathed heavily for some minutes. ²¹³Finally, with a shamefaced apology for his weakness, he rose once more.

²¹⁴“Watson would tell you that I have only just recovered from a severe illness,” he explained. ²¹⁵“I am liable to these sudden nervous attacks.”

²¹⁶“Shall I send you home in my trap?” asked old Cunningham.

²¹⁷“Well, since I am here, there is one point on which I should like to feel sure. ²¹⁸We can very easily verify it.”

²¹⁹“What was it?”

²²⁰“Well, it seems to me that it is just possible that the arrival of this poor fellow William was not before, but after, the entrance of the burglary into the house. ²²¹You appear to take it for granted that, although the door was forced, the robber never got in.”

²²²“I fancy that is quite obvious,” said Mr. Cunningham, gravely. ²²³“Why, my son Alec had not yet gone to bed, and he would certainly have heard any one moving about.”

²²⁴“Where was he sitting?”

²²⁵“I was smoking in my dressing-room.”

²²⁶“Which window is that?”

²²⁷“The last on the left next my father's.”

²²⁸“Both of your lamps were lit, of course?”

²²⁹“Undoubtedly.”

²³⁰“There are some very singular points here,” said Holmes, smiling. ²³¹“Is it not extraordinary that a burglary—and a burglar who had had some previous experience—should deliberately break into a house at a time when he could see from the lights that two of the family were still afoot?”

²³²“He must have been a cool hand.”

²³³“Well, of course, if the case were not an odd one we should not have been driven to ask you for an explanation,” said young Mr. Alec. ²³⁴“But as to your ideas that the man had robbed the house before William tackled him, I think it a most absurd notion. ²³⁵Wouldn't we have found the place disarranged, and missed the things which he had taken?”

²³⁶“It depends on what the things were,” said Holmes. ²³⁷“You must remember that we are dealing with a burglar who is a very peculiar fellow, and who appears to work on lines of his own. ²³⁸Look, for example, at the queer lot of things which he took from Acton's— what was it?— a ball of string, a letter-weight, and I don't know what other odds and ends.”

²³⁹“Well, we are quite in your hands, Mr. Holmes,” said old Cunningham. ²⁴⁰“Anything which you or the Inspector may suggest will most certainly be done.”

²⁴¹“In the first place,” said Holmes, “I should like you to offer a reward—coming from yourself, for the officials may take a little time before they would agree upon the sum, and these things cannot be done too promptly. ²⁴²I have jotted down the form here, if you would not mind signing it. ²⁴³Fifty pound was quite enough, I thought.”

²⁴⁴“I would willingly give five hundred,” said the J.P., taking the slip of paper and the pencil which Holmes handed to him. ²⁴⁵“This is not quite correct, however,” he added, glancing over the document.

²⁴⁶“I wrote it rather hurriedly.”

²⁴⁷“You see you begin, ‘Whereas, at about a quarter to one on Tuesday morning an attempt was made,’ and so on. ²⁴⁸It was at a quarter to twelve, as a matter of fact.”

²⁴⁹I was pained at the mistake, for I knew how keenly Holmes would feel any slip of the kind. ²⁵⁰It was his specialty to be accurate as to fact, but his recent illness had shaken him, and this one little incident was enough to show me that he was still far from being himself. ²⁵¹He was obviously embarrassed for an instant, while the Inspector raised his eyebrows, and Alec Cunningham burst into a laugh. ²⁵²The old gentleman corrected the mistake, however, and handed the paper back to Holmes.

²⁵³“Get it printed as soon as possible,” he said; “I think your idea is an excellent one.”

²⁵⁴Holmes put the slip of paper carefully away into his pocket-book.

²⁵⁵“And now,” said he, “it really would be a good thing that we should all go over the house together and make certain that this rather erratic burglar did not, after all, carry anything away with him.”

²⁵⁶Before entering, Holmes made an examination of the door which had been forced. ²⁵⁷It was evident that a chisel or strong knife had been thrust in, and the lock forced back with it. ²⁵⁸We could see the marks in the wood where it had been pushed in.

²⁵⁹“You don't use bars, then?” he asked.

²⁶⁰“We have never found it necessary.”

²⁶¹“You don't keep a dog?”

²⁶²“Yes, but he is chained on the other side of the house.”

²⁶³“When do the servants go to bed?”

²⁶⁴“About ten.”

²⁶⁵“I understand that William was usually in bed also at that hour.”

²⁶⁶“Yes.”

²⁶⁷“It is singular that on this particular night he should have been up. ²⁶⁸Now, I should be very glad if you would have the kindness to show us over the house, Mr. Cunningham.”

²⁶⁹A stone-flagged passage, with the kitchens branching away from it, led by a wooden staircase directly to the first floor of the house. ²⁷⁰It came out upon the landing opposite to a second more ornamental stair which came up from the front hall. ²⁷¹Out of this landing opened the drawing-room and several bedrooms, including those of Mr. Cunningham and his son. Holmes walked slowly, taking keen note of the architecture of the house. ²⁷²I could tell from his expression that he was on a hot scent, and yet I could not in the least imagine in what direction his inferences were leading him.

²⁷³“My good sir,” said Mr. Cunningham with some impatience, “this is surely very unnecessary. ²⁷⁴That is my room at the end of the stairs, and my son's is the one beyond it. ²⁷⁵I leave it to your judgment whether it was possible for the thief to have come up here without disturbing us.”

²⁷⁶“You must try round and get on a fresh scent, I fancy,” said the son with a rather malicious smile.

²⁷⁷“Still, I must ask you to humor me a little further. ²⁷⁸I should like, for example, to see how far the windows of the bedrooms command the front. ²⁷⁹This, I understand is your son's room”—he pushed open the door—“and that, I presume, is the dressing-room in which he sat smoking when the alarm was given. ²⁸⁰Where does the window of that look out to?” ²⁸¹He stepped across the bedroom, pushed open the door, and glanced round the other chamber.

²⁸²“I hope that you are satisfied now?” said Mr. Cunningham, tartly.

²⁸³“Thank you, I think I have seen all that I wished.”

²⁸⁴“Then if it is really necessary we can go into my room.”

²⁸⁵“If it is not too much trouble.”

²⁸⁶The J.P. shrugged his shoulders, and led the way into his own chamber, which was a plainly furnished and commonplace room. ²⁸⁷As we moved across it in the direction of the window, Holmes fell back until he and I were the last of the group. ²⁸⁸Near the foot of the bed stood a dish of oranges and a carafe of water. ²⁸⁹As we passed it Holmes, to my unutterable astonishment, leaned over in front of me and deliberately knocked the whole thing over. ²⁹⁰The glass smashed into a thousand pieces and the fruit rolled about into every corner of the room.

²⁹¹“You've done it now, Watson,” said he, coolly. ²⁹²“A pretty mess you've made of the carpet.”

²⁹³I stooped in some confusion and began to pick up the fruit, understanding for some reason my companion desired me to take the blame upon myself. ²⁹⁴The others did the same, and set the table on its legs again.

²⁹⁵"Hullo!" cried the Inspector, "where's he got to?"

²⁹⁶Holmes had disappeared.

²⁹⁷"Wait here an instant," said young Alec Cunningham. ²⁹⁸"The fellow is off his head, in my opinion.

²⁹⁹Come with me, father, and see where he has got to!"

³⁰⁰They rushed out of the room, leaving the Inspector, the Colonel, and me staring at each other.

³⁰¹"Pon my word, I am inclined to agree with Master Alec," said the official. ³⁰²"It may be the effect of this illness, but it seems to me that—"

³⁰³His words were cut short by a sudden scream of "Help! ³⁰⁴Help! ³⁰⁵Murder!" ³⁰⁶With a thrill I recognised the voice as that of my friend. ³⁰⁷I rushed madly from the room on to the landing. ³⁰⁸The cries, which had sunk down into a hoarse, inarticulate shouting, came from the room which we had first visited. ³⁰⁹I dashed in, and on into the dressing-room beyond. ³¹⁰The two Cunninghams were bending over the prostrate figure of Sherlock Holmes, the younger clutching his throat with both hands, while the elder seemed to be twisting one of his wrists. ³¹¹In an instant the three of us had torn them away from him, and Holmes staggered to his feet, very pale and evidently greatly exhausted.

³¹²"Arrest these men, Inspector," he gasped.

³¹³"On what charge?"

³¹⁴"That of murdering their coachman, William Kirwan."

³¹⁵The Inspector stared about him in bewilderment. ³¹⁶"Oh, come now, Mr. Holmes," said he at last, "I'm sure you don't really mean to—"

³¹⁷"Tut, man, look at their faces!" cried Holmes, curtly.

³¹⁸Never, certainly, have I seen a plainer confession of guilt upon human countenances. ³¹⁹The older man seemed numbed and dazed with a heavy, sullen expression upon his strongly-marked face. ³²⁰The son, on the other hand, had dropped all that jaunty, dashing style which had characterized him, and the ferocity of a dangerous wild beast gleamed in his dark eyes and distorted his handsome features. ³²¹The Inspector said nothing, but, stepping to the door, he blew his whistle. ³²²Two of his constables came at the call.

³²³"I have no alternative, Mr. Cunningham," said he. ³²⁴"I trust that this may all prove to be an absurd mistake, but you can see that— ³²⁵Ah, would you? ³²⁶Drop it!" ³²⁷He struck out with his hand, and a revolver which the younger man was in the act of cocking clattered down upon the floor.

³²⁸"Keep that," said Holmes, quietly putting his foot upon it; "you will find it useful at the trial. ³²⁹But this is what we really wanted." ³³⁰He held up a little crumpled piece of paper.

³³¹"The remainder of the sheet!" cried the Inspector.

³³²"Precisely."

³³³"And where was it?"

³³⁴"Where I was sure it must be. ³³⁵I'll make the whole matter clear to you presently. ³³⁶I think, Colonel, that you and Watson might return now, and I will be with you again in an hour at the furthest. ³³⁷The

Inspector and I must have a word with the prisoners, but you will certainly see me back at luncheon time.”

³³⁸Sherlock Holmes was as good as his word, for about one o'clock he rejoined us in the Colonel's smoking-room. ³³⁹He was accompanied by a little elderly gentleman, who was introduced to me as the Mr. Acton whose house had been the scene of the original burglary.

³⁴⁰“I wished Mr. Acton to be present while I demonstrated this small matter to you,” said Holmes, “for it is natural that he should take a keen interest in the details. ³⁴¹I am afraid, my dear Colonel, that you must regret the hour that you took in such a stormy petrel as I am.”

³⁴²“On the contrary,” answered the Colonel, warmly, “I consider it the greatest privilege to have been permitted to study your methods of working. ³⁴³I confess that they quite surpass my expectations, and that I am utterly unable to account for your result. ³⁴⁴I have not yet seen the vestige of a clue.”

³⁴⁵“I am afraid that my explanation may disillusion you but it has always been my habit to hide none of my methods, either from my friend Watson or from any one who might take an intelligent interest in them. ³⁴⁶But, first, as I am rather shaken by the knocking about which I had in the dressing-room, I think that I shall help myself to a dash of your brandy, Colonel. ³⁴⁷My strength had been rather tried of late.”

³⁴⁸“I trust that you had no more of those nervous attacks.”

³⁴⁹Sherlock Holmes laughed heartily. ³⁵⁰“We will come to that in its turn,” said he. ³⁵¹“I will lay an account of the case before you in its due order, showing you the various points which guided me in my decision. ³⁵²Pray interrupt me if there is any inference which is not perfectly clear to you.

³⁵³“It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognize, out of a number of facts, which are incidental and which vital. ³⁵⁴Otherwise your energy and attention must be dissipated instead of being concentrated. ³⁵⁵Now, in this case there was not the slightest doubt in my mind from the first that the key of the whole matter must be looked for in the scrap of paper in the dead man's hand.

³⁵⁶“Before going into this, I would draw your attention to the fact that, if Alec Cunningham's narrative was correct, and if the assailant, after shooting William Kirwan, had instantly fled, then it obviously could not be he who tore the paper from the dead man's hand. ³⁵⁷But if it was not he, it must have been Alec Cunningham himself, for by the time that the old man had descended several servants were upon the scene. ³⁵⁸The point is a simple one, but the Inspector had overlooked it because he had started with the supposition that these county magnates had had nothing to do with the matter. ³⁵⁹Now, I make a point of never having any prejudices, and of following docilely wherever fact may lead me, and so, in the very first stage of the investigation, I found myself looking a little askance at the part which had been played by Mr. Alec Cunningham.

³⁶⁰“And now I made a very careful examination of the corner of paper which the Inspector had submitted to us. ³⁶¹It was at once clear to me that it formed part of a very remarkable document. ³⁶²Here it is. ³⁶³Do you not now observed something very suggestive about it?”

³⁶⁴“It has a very irregular look,” said the Colonel.

³⁶⁵“My dear sir,” cried Holmes, “there cannot be the least doubt in the world that it has been written by two persons doing alternate words. ³⁶⁶When I draw your attention to the strong t's of ‘at’ and ‘to’, and ask you to compare them with the weak ones of ‘quarter’ and ‘twelve,’ you will instantly recognize the fact. ³⁶⁷A very brief analysis of these four words would enable you to say with the utmost confidence that the ‘learn’ and the ‘maybe’ are written in the stronger hand, and the ‘what’ in the weaker.”

³⁶⁸“By Jove, it's as clear as day!” cried the Colonel. ³⁶⁹“Why on earth should two men write a letter in such a fashion?”

³⁷⁰“Obviously the business was a bad one, and one of the men who distrusted the other was determined that, whatever was done, each should have an equal hand in it. ³⁷¹Now, of the two men, it is clear that the one who wrote the ‘at’ and ‘to’ was the ringleader.”

³⁷²“How do you get at that?”

³⁷³“We might deduce it from the mere character of the one hand as compared with the other. ³⁷⁴But we have more assured reasons than that for supposing it. ³⁷⁵If you examine this scrap with attention you will come to the conclusion that the man with the stronger hand wrote all his words first, leaving blanks for the other to fill up. ³⁷⁵These blanks were not always sufficient, and you can see that the second man had a squeeze to fit his ‘quarter’ in between the ‘at’ and the ‘to,’ showing that the latter were already written. ³⁷⁶The man who wrote all his words first is undoubtedly the man who planned the affair.”

³⁷⁷“Excellent!” cried Mr. Acton.

³⁷⁸“But very superficial,” said Holmes. ³⁷⁹“We come now, however, to a point which is of importance. ³⁸⁰You may not be aware that the deduction of a man's age from his writing is one which has been brought to considerable accuracy by experts. ³⁸¹In normal cases one can place a man in his true decade with tolerable confidence. ³⁸²I say normal cases, because ill-health and physical weakness reproduce the signs of old age, even when the invalid is a youth. ³⁸³In this case, looking at the bold, strong hand of the one, and the rather broken-backed appearance of the other, which still retains its legibility although the t's have begun to lose their crossing, we can say that the one was a young man and the other was advanced in years without being positively decrepit.”

³⁸⁴“Excellent!” cried Mr. Acton again.

³⁸⁵“There is a further point, however, which is subtler and of greater interest. ³⁸⁶There is something in common between these hands. ³⁸⁷They belong to men who are blood-relatives. ³⁸⁸It may be most obvious to you in the Greek e's, but to me there are many small points which indicate the same thing. ³⁸⁹I have no doubt at all that a family mannerism can be traced in these two specimens of writing. ³⁹⁰I am only, of course, giving you the leading results now of my examination of the paper. ³⁹¹There were twenty-three other deductions which would be of more interest to experts than to you. ³⁹²They all tended to deepen the impression upon my mind that the Cunninghams, father and son, had written this letter.

³⁹³“Having got so far, my next step was, of course, to examine into the details of the crime, and to see how far they would help us. ³⁹⁴I went up to the house with the Inspector, and saw all that was to be seen. ³⁹⁵The wound upon the dead man was, as I was able to determine with absolute confidence, fired from a revolver at the distance of something over four yards. ³⁹⁶There was no powder-blackening on the clothes. ³⁹⁷Evidently, therefore, Alec Cunningham had lied when he said that the two men were struggling when the shot was fired. ³⁹⁸Again, both father and son agreed as to the place where the man escaped into the road. ³⁹⁹At that point, however, as it happens, there is a broadish ditch, moist at the bottom. ⁴⁰⁰As there were no indications of bootmarks about this ditch, I was absolutely sure not only that the Cunninghams had again lied, but that there had never been any unknown man upon the scene at all.

⁴⁰¹“And now I have to consider the motive of this singular crime. ⁴⁰²To get at this, I endeavored first of all to solve the reason of the original burglary at Mr. Acton's. ⁴⁰³I understood, from something which the Colonel told us, that a lawsuit had been going on between you, Mr. Acton, and the Cunninghams. ⁴⁰⁴Of course, it instantly occurred to me that they had broken into your library with the intention of getting at some document which might be of importance in the case.”

⁴⁰⁵“Precisely so,” said Mr. Acton. ⁴⁰⁶“There can be no possible doubt as to their intentions. ⁴⁰⁷I have the clearest claim upon half of their present estate, and if they could have found a single paper—which, fortunately, was in the strong-box of my solicitors—they would undoubtedly have crippled our case.”

⁴⁰⁸“There you are,” said Holmes, smiling. ⁴⁰⁹“It was a dangerous, reckless attempt, in which I seem to trace the influence of young Alec. Having found nothing they tried to divert suspicion by making it appear to be an ordinary burglary, to which end they carried off whatever they could lay their hands upon. ⁴¹⁰That is all clear enough, but there was much that was still obscure. ⁴¹¹What I wanted above all was to get the missing part of that note. ⁴¹²I was certain that Alec had torn it out of the dead man's hand, and almost certain that he must have thrust it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. ⁴¹³Where else could he have put it? ⁴¹⁴The only question was whether it was still there. ⁴¹⁵It was worth an effort to find out, and for that object we all went up to the house.

⁴¹⁶“The Cunninghams joined us, as you doubtless remember, outside the kitchen door. ⁴¹⁷It was, of course, of the very first importance that they should not be reminded of the existence of this paper, otherwise they would naturally destroy it without delay. ⁴¹⁸The Inspector was about to tell them the importance which we attached to it when, by the luckiest chance in the world, I tumbled down in a sort of fit and so changed the conversation.”

⁴¹⁹“Good heavens!” cried the Colonel, laughing, “do you mean to say all our sympathy was wasted and your fit an imposture?”

⁴²⁰“Speaking professionally, it was admirably done,” cried I, looking in amazement at this man who was forever confounding me with some new phase of his astuteness.

⁴²¹“It is an art which is often useful,” said he. ⁴²²“When I recovered I managed, by a device which had perhaps some little merit of ingenuity, to get old Cunningham to write the word ‘twelve,’ so that I might compare it with the ‘twelve’ upon the paper.”

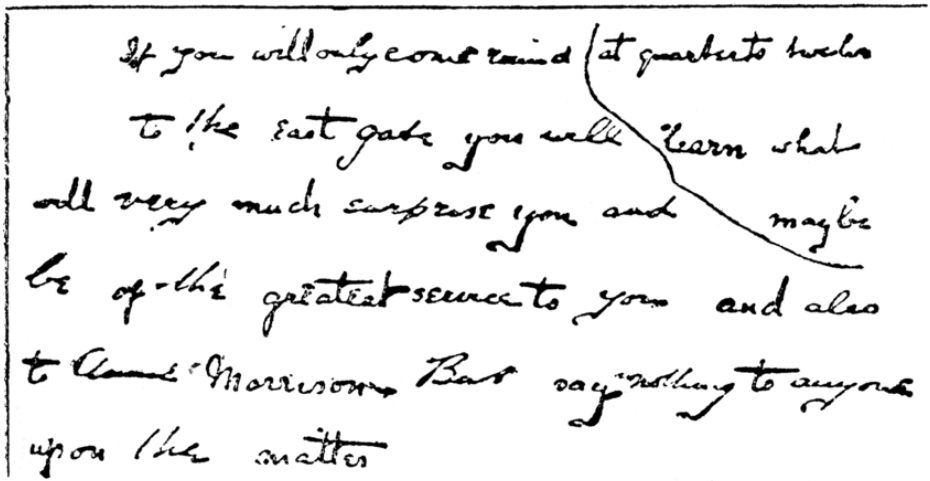
⁴²³“Oh, what an ass I have been!” I exclaimed.

⁴²⁴“I could see that you were commiserating with me over my weakness,” said Holmes, laughing. ⁴²⁵“I was sorry to cause you the sympathetic pain which I know that you felt. ⁴²⁶We then went upstairs together, and having entered the room and seen the dressing-gown hanging up behind the door, I contrived, by upsetting a table, to engage their attention for the moment, and slipped back to examine the pockets. ⁴²⁷I had hardly got the paper, however—which was, as I had expected, in one of them—when the two Cunninghams were on me, and would, I verily believe, have murdered me then and there but for your prompt and friendly aid. ⁴²⁸As it is, I feel that young man's grip on my throat now, and the father has twisted my wrist round in the effort to get the paper out of my hand. ⁴²⁹They saw that I must know all about it, you see, and the sudden change from absolute security to complete despair made them perfectly desperate.

⁴³⁰“I had a little talk with old Cunningham afterwards as to the motive of the crime. ⁴³¹He was tractable enough, though his son was a perfect demon, ready to blow out his own or anybody else's brains if he could have got to his revolver. ⁴³²When Cunningham saw that the case against him was so strong he lost all heart and made a clean breast of everything. ⁴³³It seems that William had secretly followed his two masters on the night when they made their raid upon Mr. Acton's, and having thus got them into his power, proceeded, under threats of exposure, to levy black-mail upon them. ⁴³⁴Mr. Alec, however, was a dangerous man to play games of that sort with. ⁴³⁵It was a stroke of positive genius on his part to see in the burglary scare which was convulsing the country side an opportunity of plausibly getting rid of the man whom he feared. ⁴³⁶William was decoyed up and shot, and had they only got the whole of the note and paid a little more attention to detail in the accessories, it is very possible that suspicion might never have been aroused.”

⁴³⁷“And the note?” I asked.

⁴³⁸Sherlock Holmes placed the subjoined paper before us.



If you will only come round (at quarter to twelve
to the east gate you will learn what
will very much surprise you and maybe
be of the greatest service to you and also
to Annie Morrison. But say nothing to anyone
upon the matter

[⁴³⁹If you will only come around at quarter to twelve to the east gate you will learn what will very much surprise you and may be of the greatest service to you and also to Annie Morrison. ⁴⁴⁰But say nothing to anyone upon the matter]

⁴⁴¹"It is very much the sort of thing that I expected," said he. ⁴⁴²"Of course, we do not yet know what the relations may have been between Alec Cunningham, William Kirwan, and Annie Morrison. ⁴⁴³The results shows that the trap was skillfully baited. ⁴⁴⁴I am sure that you cannot fail to be delighted with the traces of heredity shown in the p's and in the tails of the g's. ⁴⁴⁵The absence of the i-dots in the old man's writing is also most characteristic. ⁴⁴⁶Watson, I think our quiet rest in the country has been a distinct success, and I shall certainly return much invigorated to Baker Street to-morrow."

The Crooked Man

¹One summer night, a few months after my marriage, I was seated by my own hearth smoking a last pipe and nodding over a novel, for my day's work had been an exhausting one. ²My wife had already gone upstairs, and the sound of the locking of the hall door some time before told me that the servants had also retired. ³I had risen from my seat and was knocking out the ashes of my pipe when I suddenly heard the clang of the bell.

⁴I looked at the clock. ⁵It was a quarter to twelve. ⁶This could not be a visitor at so late an hour. ⁷A patient, evidently, and possibly an all-night sitting. ⁸With a wry face I went out into the hall and opened the door. ⁹To my astonishment it was Sherlock Holmes who stood upon my step.

¹⁰"Ah, Watson," said he, "I hoped that I might not be too late to catch you."

¹¹"My dear fellow, pray come in."

¹²"You look surprised, and no wonder! ¹³Relieved, too, I fancy! ¹⁴Hum! ¹⁵You still smoke the Arcadia mixture of your bachelor days then! ¹⁶There's no mistaking that fluffy ash upon your coat. ¹⁷It's easy to tell that you have been accustomed to wear a uniform, Watson. ¹⁸You'll never pass as a pure-bred civilian as long as you keep that habit of carrying your handkerchief in your sleeve. ¹⁹Could you put me up tonight?"

²⁰"With pleasure."

²¹"You told me that you had bachelor quarters for one, and I see that you have no gentleman visitor at present. ²²Your hat-stand proclaims as much."

²³"I shall be delighted if you will stay."

²⁴"Thank you. ²⁵I'll fill the vacant peg then. ²⁶Sorry to see that you've had the British workman in the house. ²⁷He's a token of evil. ²⁸Not the drains, I hope?"

²⁹"No, the gas."

³⁰"Ah! ³¹He has left two nail-marks from his boot upon your linoleum just where the light strikes it. ³²No, thank you, I had some supper at Waterloo, but I'll smoke a pipe with you with pleasure."

³³I handed him my pouch, and he seated himself opposite to me and smoked for some time in silence. ³⁴I was well aware that nothing but business of importance would have brought him to me at such an hour, so I waited patiently until he should come round to it.

³⁵"I see that you are professionally rather busy just now," said he, glancing very keenly across at me.

³⁶"Yes, I've had a busy day," I answered. ³⁷"It may seem very foolish in your eyes," I added, "but really I don't know how you deduced it."

³⁸Holmes chuckled to himself.

³⁹"I have the advantage of knowing your habits, my dear Watson," said he. ⁴⁰"When your round is a short one you walk, and when it is a long one you use a hansom. ⁴¹As I perceive that your boots, although used, are by no means dirty, I cannot doubt that you are at present busy enough to justify the hansom."

⁴²"Excellent!" I cried.

⁴³"Elementary," said he. ⁴⁴"It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbor, because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis

of the deduction. ⁴⁵The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of these little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your retaining in your own hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader. ⁴⁶Now, at present I am in the position of these same readers, for I hold in this hand several threads of one of the strangest cases which ever perplexed a man's brain, and yet I lack the one or two which are needful to complete my theory. ⁴⁷But I'll have them, Watson, I'll have them!" ⁴⁸His eyes kindled and a slight flush sprang into his thin cheeks. ⁴⁹For an instant the veil had lifted upon his keen, intense nature, but for an instant only. ⁵⁰When I glanced again his face had resumed that red-Indian composure which had made so many regard him as a machine rather than a man.

⁵¹"The problem presents features of interest," said he. ⁵²"I may even say exceptional features of interest. ⁵³I have already looked into the matter, and have come, as I think, within sight of my solution. ⁵⁴If you could accompany me in that last step you might be of considerable service to me."

⁵⁵"I should be delighted."

⁵⁶"Could you go as far as Aldershot to-morrow?"

⁵⁷"I have no doubt Jackson would take my practice."

⁵⁸"Very good. ⁵⁹I want to start by the 11.10 from Waterloo."

⁶⁰"That would give me time."

⁶¹"Then, if you are not too sleepy, I will give you a sketch of what has happened, and of what remains to be done."

⁶²"I was sleepy before you came. ⁶³I am quite wakeful now."

⁶⁴"I will compress the story as far as may be done without omitting anything vital to the case. ⁶⁵It is conceivable that you may even have read some account of the matter. ⁶⁶It is the supposed murder of Colonel Barclay, of the Royal Munsters, at Aldershot, which I am investigating."

⁶⁷"I have heard nothing of it."

⁶⁸"It has not excited much attention yet, except locally. ⁶⁹The facts are only two days old. ⁷⁰Briefly they are these:

⁷¹"The Royal Munsters is, as you know, one of the most famous Irish regiments in the British army. ⁷²It did wonders both in the Crimea and the Mutiny, and has since that time distinguished itself upon every possible occasion. ⁷³It was commanded up to Monday night by James Barclay, a gallant veteran, who started as a full private, was raised to commissioned rank for his bravery at the time of the Mutiny, and so lived to command the regiment in which he had once carried a musket.

⁷⁴"Colonel Barclay had married at the time when he was a sergeant, and his wife, whose maiden name was Miss Nancy Devoy, was the daughter of a former color-sergeant in the same corps. ⁷⁵There was, therefore, as can be imagined, some little social friction when the young couple (for they were still young) found themselves in their new surroundings. ⁷⁶They appear, however, to have quickly adapted themselves, and Mrs. Barclay has always, I understand, been as popular with the ladies of the regiment as her husband was with his brother officers. ⁷⁷I may add that she was a woman of great beauty, and that even now, when she has been married for upwards of thirty years, she is still of a striking and queenly appearance.

⁷⁸"Colonel Barclay's family life appears to have been a uniformly happy one. ⁷⁹Major Murphy, to whom I owe most of my facts, assures me that he has never heard of any misunderstanding between the pair.

⁸⁰On the whole, he thinks that Barclay's devotion to his wife was greater than his wife's to Barclay. ⁸¹He

was acutely uneasy if he were absent from her for a day. ⁸²She, on the other hand, though devoted and faithful, was less obtrusively affectionate. ⁸³But they were regarded in the regiment as the very model of a middle-aged couple. ⁸⁴There was absolutely nothing in their mutual relations to prepare people for the tragedy which was to follow.

⁸⁵“Colonel Barclay himself seems to have had some singular traits in his character. ⁸⁶He was a dashing, jovial old soldier in his usual mood, but there were occasions on which he seemed to show himself capable of considerable violence and vindictiveness. ⁸⁷This side of his nature, however, appears never to have been turned towards his wife. ⁸⁸Another fact, which had struck Major Murphy and three out of five of the other officers with whom I conversed, was the singular sort of depression which came upon him at times. ⁸⁹As the major expressed it, the smile had often been struck from his mouth, as if by some invisible hand, when he has been joining the gaieties and chaff of the mess-table. ⁹⁰For days on end, when the mood was on him, he has been sunk in the deepest gloom. ⁹¹This and a certain tinge of superstition were the only unusual traits in his character which his brother officers had observed. ⁹²The latter peculiarity took the form of a dislike to being left alone, especially after dark. ⁹³This puerile feature in a nature which was conspicuously manly had often given rise to comment and conjecture.

⁹⁴“The first battalion of the Royal Munsters (which is the old 117th) has been stationed at Aldershot for some years. ⁹⁵The married officers live out of barracks, and the Colonel has during all this time occupied a villa called Lachine, about half a mile from the north camp. ⁹⁶The house stands in its own grounds, but the west side of it is not more than thirty yards from the high-road. ⁹⁷A coachman and two maids form the staff of servants. ⁹⁸These with their master and mistress were the sole occupants of Lachine, for the Barclays had no children, nor was it usual for them to have resident visitors.

⁹⁹“Now for the events at Lachine between nine and ten on the evening of last Monday.

¹⁰⁰“Mrs. Barclay was, it appears, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and had interested herself very much in the establishment of the Guild of St. George, which was formed in connection with the Watt Street Chapel for the purpose of supplying the poor with cast-off clothing. ¹⁰¹A meeting of the Guild had been held that evening at eight, and Mrs. Barclay had hurried over her dinner in order to be present at it. ¹⁰²When leaving the house she was heard by the coachman to make some commonplace remark to her husband, and to assure him that she would be back before very long. ¹⁰³She then called for Miss Morrison, a young lady who lives in the next villa, and the two went off together to their meeting. ¹⁰⁴It lasted forty minutes, and at a quarter-past nine Mrs. Barclay returned home, having left Miss Morrison at her door as she passed.

¹⁰⁵“There is a room which is used as a morning-room at Lachine. ¹⁰⁶This faces the road and opens by a large glass folding-door on to the lawn. ¹⁰⁷The lawn is thirty yards across, and is only divided from the highway by a low wall with an iron rail above it. ¹⁰⁸It was into this room that Mrs. Barclay went upon her return. ¹⁰⁹The blinds were not down, for the room was seldom used in the evening, but Mrs. Barclay herself lit the lamp and then rang the bell, asking Jane Stewart, the house-maid, to bring her a cup of tea, which was quite contrary to her usual habits. ¹¹⁰The Colonel had been sitting in the dining-room, but hearing that his wife had returned he joined her in the morning-room. ¹¹¹The coachman saw him cross the hall and enter it. ¹¹²He was never seen again alive.

¹¹³“The tea which had been ordered was brought up at the end of ten minutes; but the maid, as she approached the door, was surprised to hear the voices of her master and mistress in furious altercation. ¹¹⁴She knocked without receiving any answer, and even turned the handle, but only to find that the door was locked upon the inside. ¹¹⁵Naturally enough she ran down to tell the cook, and the two women with the coachman came up into the hall and listened to the dispute which was still raging. ¹¹⁶They all agreed that only two voices were to be heard, those of Barclay and of his wife. Barclay's remarks were subdued and abrupt, so that none of them were audible to the listeners. ¹¹⁷The lady's, on the other hand, were most bitter, and when she raised her voice could be plainly heard. ¹¹⁸“You coward!’ she repeated over

and over again. ¹¹⁹“What can be done now? ¹²⁰What can be done now? ¹²¹Give me back my life. ¹²²I will never so much as breathe the same air with you again! ¹²³You coward! ¹²⁴You Coward!’ ¹²⁵Those were scraps of her conversation, ending in a sudden dreadful cry in the man's voice, with a crash, and a piercing scream from the woman. ¹²⁶Convinced that some tragedy had occurred, the coachman rushed to the door and strove to force it, while scream after scream issued from within. ¹²⁷He was unable, however, to make his way in, and the maids were too distracted with fear to be of any assistance to him. ¹²⁸A sudden thought struck him, however, and he ran through the hall door and round to the lawn upon which the long French windows open. ¹²⁹One side of the window was open, which I understand was quite usual in the summer-time, and he passed without difficulty into the room. ¹³⁰His mistress had ceased to scream and was stretched insensible upon a couch, while with his feet tilted over the side of an arm-chair, and his head upon the ground near the corner of the fender, was lying the unfortunate soldier stone dead in a pool of his own blood.

¹³¹“Naturally, the coachman's first thought, on finding that he could do nothing for his master, was to open the door. ¹³²But here an unexpected and singular difficulty presented itself. ¹³³The key was not in the inner side of the door, nor could he find it anywhere in the room. ¹³⁴He went out again, therefore, through the window, and having obtained the help of a policeman and of a medical man, he returned. ¹³⁵The lady, against whom naturally the strongest suspicion rested, was removed to her room, still in a state of insensibility. ¹³⁶The Colonel's body was then placed upon the sofa, and a careful examination made of the scene of the tragedy.

¹³⁷“The injury from which the unfortunate veteran was suffering was found to be a jagged cut some two inches long at the back part of his head, which had evidently been caused by a violent blow from a blunt weapon. ¹³⁸Nor was it difficult to guess what that weapon may have been. ¹³⁹Upon the floor, close to the body, was lying a singular club of hard carved wood with a bone handle. ¹⁴⁰The Colonel possessed a varied collection of weapons brought from the different countries in which he had fought, and it is conjectured by the police that his club was among his trophies. ¹⁴¹The servants deny having seen it before, but among the numerous curiosities in the house it is possible that it may have been overlooked. ¹⁴²Nothing else of importance was discovered in the room by the police, save the inexplicable fact that neither upon Mrs. Barclay's person nor upon that of the victim nor in any part of the room was the missing key to be found. ¹⁴³The door had eventually to be opened by a locksmith from Aldershot.

¹⁴⁴“That was the state of things, Watson, when upon the Tuesday morning I, at the request of Major Murphy, went down to Aldershot to supplement the efforts of the police. ¹⁴⁵I think that you will acknowledge that the problem was already one of interest, but my observations soon made me realize that it was in truth much more extraordinary than would at first sight appear.

¹⁴⁶“Before examining the room I cross-questioned the servants, but only succeeded in eliciting the facts which I have already stated. ¹⁴⁷One other detail of interest was remembered by Jane Stewart, the housemaid. ¹⁴⁸You will remember that on hearing the sound of the quarrel she descended and returned with the other servants. ¹⁴⁹On that first occasion, when she was alone, she says that the voices of her master and mistress were sunk so low that she could hear hardly anything, and judged by their tones rather than their words that they had fallen out. ¹⁵⁰On my pressing her, however, she remembered that she heard the word David uttered twice by the lady. ¹⁵¹The point is of the utmost importance as guiding us towards the reason of the sudden quarrel. ¹⁵²The Colonel's name, you remember, was James.

¹⁵³“There was one thing in the case which had made the deepest impression both upon the servants and the police. ¹⁵⁴This was the contortion of the Colonel's face. ¹⁵⁵It had set, according to their account, into the most dreadful expression of fear and horror which a human countenance is capable of assuming. ¹⁵⁶More than one person fainted at the mere sight of him, so terrible was the effect. ¹⁵⁷It was quite certain that he had foreseen his fate, and that it had caused him the utmost horror. ¹⁵⁸This, of course, fitted in well enough with the police theory, if the Colonel could have seen his wife making a murderous attack upon him. ¹⁵⁹Nor was the fact of the wound being on the back of his head a fatal objection to this, as he

might have turned to avoid the blow. ¹⁶⁰No information could be got from the lady herself, who was temporarily insane from an acute attack of brain-fever.

¹⁶¹“From the police I learned that Miss Morrison, who you remember went out that evening with Mrs. Barclay, denied having any knowledge of what it was which had caused the ill-humor in which her companion had returned.

¹⁶²“Having gathered these facts, Watson, I smoked several pipes over them, trying to separate those which were crucial from others which were merely incidental. ¹⁶³There could be no question that the most distinctive and suggestive point in the case was the singular disappearance of the door-key. ¹⁶⁴A most careful search had failed to discover it in the room. ¹⁶⁵Therefore it must have been taken from it. ¹⁶⁶But neither the Colonel nor the Colonel's wife could have taken it. ¹⁶⁷That was perfectly clear. ¹⁶⁸Therefore a third person must have entered the room. ¹⁶⁹And that third person could only have come in through the window. ¹⁷⁰It seemed to me that a careful examination of the room and the lawn might possibly reveal some traces of this mysterious individual. ¹⁷¹You know my methods, Watson. ¹⁷²There was not one of them which I did not apply to the inquiry. ¹⁷³And it ended by my discovering traces, but very different ones from those which I had expected. ¹⁷⁴There had been a man in the room, and he had crossed the lawn coming from the road. ¹⁷⁵I was able to obtain five very clear impressions of his foot-marks: one in the roadway itself, at the point where he had climbed the low wall, two on the lawn, and two very faint ones upon the stained boards near the window where he had entered. ¹⁷⁶He had apparently rushed across the lawn, for his toe-marks were much deeper than his heels. ¹⁷⁷But it was not the man who surprised me. ¹⁷⁸It was his companion.”

¹⁷⁹“His companion!”

¹⁸⁰Holmes pulled a large sheet of tissue-paper out of his pocket and carefully unfolded it upon his knee.

¹⁸¹“What do you make of that?” he asked.

¹⁸²The paper was covered with the tracings of the foot-marks of some small animal. ¹⁸³It had five well-marked foot-pads, an indication of long nails, and the whole print might be nearly as large as a dessert-spoon.

¹⁸⁴“It's a dog,” said I.

¹⁸⁵“Did you ever hear of a dog running up a curtain? ¹⁸⁶I found distinct traces that this creature had done so.”

¹⁸⁷“A monkey, then?”

¹⁸⁸“But it is not the print of a monkey.”

¹⁸⁹“What can it be, then?”

¹⁹⁰“Neither dog nor cat nor monkey nor any creature that we are familiar with. ¹⁹¹I have tried to reconstruct it from the measurements. ¹⁹²Here are four prints where the beast has been standing motionless. ¹⁹³You see that it is no less than fifteen inches from fore-foot to hind. ¹⁹⁴Add to that the length of neck and head, and you get a creature not much less than two feet long—probably more if there is any tail. ¹⁹⁵But now observe this other measurement. ¹⁹⁶The animal has been moving, and we have the length of its stride. ¹⁹⁷In each case it is only about three inches. ¹⁹⁸You have an indication, you see, of a long body with very short legs attached to it. ¹⁹⁹It has not been considerate enough to leave any of its hair behind it. ²⁰⁰But its general shape must be what I have indicated, and it can run up a curtain, and it is carnivorous.”

²⁰¹“How do you deduce that?”

²⁰²“Because it ran up the curtain. ²⁰³A canary's cage was hanging in the window, and its aim seems to have been to get at the bird.”

²⁰⁴“Then what was the beast?”

²⁰⁵“Ah, if I could give it a name it might go a long way towards solving the case. ²⁰⁶On the whole, it was probably some creature of the weasel and stoat tribe—and yet it is larger than any of these that I have seen.”

²⁰⁷“But what had it to do with the crime?”

²⁰⁸“That, also, is still obscure. ²⁰⁹But we have learned a good deal, you perceive. ²¹⁰We know that a man stood in the road looking at the quarrel between the Barclays—the blinds were up and the room lighted. ²¹¹We know, also, that he ran across the lawn, entered the room, accompanied by a strange animal, and that he either struck the Colonel or, as is equally possible, that the Colonel fell down from sheer fright at the sight of him, and cut his head on the corner of the fender. ²¹²Finally, we have the curious fact that the intruder carried away the key with him when he left.”

²¹³“Your discoveries seem to have left the business more obscure than it was before,” said I.

²¹⁴“Quite so. ²¹⁵They undoubtedly showed that the affair was much deeper than was at first conjectured. ²¹⁶I thought the matter over, and I came to the conclusion that I must approach the case from another aspect. ²¹⁷But really, Watson, I am keeping you up, and I might just as well tell you all this on our way to Aldershot to-morrow.”

²¹⁸“Thank you, you have gone rather too far to stop.”

²¹⁹“It is quite certain that when Mrs. Barclay left the house at half-past seven she was on good terms with her husband. ²²⁰She was never, as I think I have said, ostentatiously affectionate, but she was heard by the coachman chatting with the Colonel in a friendly fashion. ²²¹Now, it was equally certain that, immediately on her return, she had gone to the room in which she was least likely to see her husband, had flown to tea as an agitated woman will, and finally, on his coming in to her, had broken into violent recriminations. ²²²Therefore something had occurred between seven-thirty and nine o'clock which had completely altered her feelings towards him. ²²³But Miss Morrison had been with her during the whole of that hour and a half. ²²⁴It was absolutely certain, therefore, in spite of her denial, that she must know something of the matter.

²²⁵“My first conjecture was, that possibly there had been some passages between this young lady and the old soldier, which the former had now confessed to the wife. ²²⁶That would account for the angry return, and also for the girl's denial that anything had occurred. ²²⁷Nor would it be entirely incompatible with most of the words overhead. ²²⁸But there was the reference to David, and there was the known affection of the Colonel for his wife, to weigh against it, to say nothing of the tragic intrusion of this other man, which might, of course, be entirely disconnected with what had gone before. ²²⁹It was not easy to pick one's steps, but, on the whole, I was inclined to dismiss the idea that there had been anything between the Colonel and Miss Morrison, but more than ever convinced that the young lady held the clue as to what it was which had turned Mrs. Barclay to hatred of her husband. ²³⁰I took the obvious course, therefore, of calling upon Miss M., of explaining to her that I was perfectly certain that she held the facts in her possession, and of assuring her that her friend, Mrs. Barclay, might find herself in the dock upon a capital charge unless the matter were cleared up.

²³¹“Miss Morrison is a little ethereal slip of a girl, with timid eyes and blond hair, but I found her by no means wanting in shrewdness and common-sense. ²³²She sat thinking for some time after I had spoken, and then, turning to me with a brisk air of resolution, she broke into a remarkable statement which I will condense for your benefit.

²³³“‘I promised my friend that I would say nothing of the matter, and a promise is a promise,’ said she; ‘but if I can really help her when so serious a charge is laid against her, and when her own mouth, poor darling, is closed by illness, then I think I am absolved from my promise. ²³⁴I will tell you exactly what happened upon Monday evening.

²³⁵“‘We were returning from the Watt Street Mission about a quarter to nine o'clock. ²³⁶On our way we had to pass through Hudson Street, which is a very quiet thoroughfare. ²³⁷There is only one lamp in it, upon the left-hand side, and as we approached this lamp I saw a man coming towards us with his back very bent, and something like a box slung over one of his shoulders. ²³⁸He appeared to be deformed, for he carried his head low and walked with his knees bent. ²³⁹We were passing him when he raised his face to look at us in the circle of light thrown by the lamp, and as he did so he stopped and screamed out in a dreadful voice, “My God, it's Nancy!” ²⁴⁰Mrs. Barclay turned as white as death, and would have fallen down had the dreadful-looking creature not caught hold of her. ²⁴¹I was going to call for the police, but she, to my surprise, spoke quite civilly to the fellow.

²⁴²““I thought you had been dead this thirty years, Henry,” said she, in a shaking voice.

²⁴³““So I have,” said he, and it was awful to hear the tones that he said it in. ²⁴⁴He had a very dark, fearsome face, and a gleam in his eyes that comes back to me in my dreams. ²⁴⁵His hair and whiskers were shot with gray, and his face was all crinkled and puckered like a withered apple.

²⁴⁶““Just walk on a little way, dear,” said Mrs. Barclay; “I want to have a word with this man. ²⁴⁷There is nothing to be afraid of.” ²⁴⁸She tried to speak boldly, but she was still deadly pale and could hardly get her words out for the trembling of her lips.

²⁴⁹““I did as she asked me, and they talked together for a few minutes. ²⁵⁰Then she came down the street with her eyes blazing, and I saw the crippled wretch standing by the lamp-post and shaking his clenched fists in the air as if he were mad with rage. ²⁵¹She never said a word until we were at the door here, when she took me by the hand and begged me to tell no one what had happened.

²⁵²““It's an old acquaintance of mine who has come down in the world,” said she. ²⁵³When I promised her I would say nothing she kissed me, and I have never seen her since. ²⁵⁴I have told you now the whole truth, and if I withheld it from the police it is because I did not realize then the danger in which my dear friend stood. ²⁵⁵I know that it can only be to her advantage that everything should be known.’

²⁵⁶“There was her statement, Watson, and to me, as you can imagine, it was like a light on a dark night. ²⁵⁷Everything which had been disconnected before began at once to assume its true place, and I had a shadowy presentiment of the whole sequence of events. ²⁵⁸My next step obviously was to find the man who had produced such a remarkable impression upon Mrs. Barclay. ²⁵⁹If he were still in Aldershot it should not be a very difficult matter. ²⁶⁰There are not such a very great number of civilians, and a deformed man was sure to have attracted attention. ²⁶¹I spent a day in the search, and by evening—this very evening, Watson—I had run him down. ²⁶²The man's name is Henry Wood, and he lives in lodgings in this same street in which the ladies met him. ²⁶³He has only been five days in the place. ²⁶⁴In the character of a registration-agent I had a most interesting gossip with his landlady. ²⁶⁵The man is by trade a conjurer and performer, going round the canteens after nightfall, and giving a little entertainment at each. ²⁶⁶He carries some creature about with him in that box; about which the landlady seemed to be in considerable trepidation, for she had never seen an animal like it. ²⁶⁷He uses it in some of his tricks according to her account. ²⁶⁸So much the woman was able to tell me, and also that it was a wonder the man lived, seeing how twisted he was, and that he spoke in a strange tongue sometimes, and that for the last two nights she had heard him groaning and weeping in his bedroom. ²⁶⁹He was all right, as far as money went, but in his deposit he had given her what looked like a bad florin. ²⁷⁰She showed it to me, Watson, and it was an Indian rupee.

²⁷¹“So now, my dear fellow, you see exactly how we stand and why it is I want you. ²⁷²It is perfectly plain that after the ladies parted from this man he followed them at a distance, that he saw the quarrel between husband and wife through the window, that he rushed in, and that the creature which he carried in his box got loose. ²⁷³That is all very certain. ²⁷⁴But he is the only person in this world who can tell us exactly what happened in that room.”

²⁷⁵“And you intend to ask him?”

²⁷⁶“Most certainly—but in the presence of a witness.”

²⁷⁷“And I am the witness?”

²⁷⁸“If you will be so good. ²⁷⁹If he can clear the matter up, well and good. ²⁸⁰If he refuses, we have no alternative but to apply for a warrant.”

²⁸¹“But how do you know he'll be there when we return?”

²⁸²“You may be sure that I took some precautions. ²⁸³I have one of my Baker Street boys mounting guard over him who would stick to him like a burr, go where he might. ²⁸⁴We shall find him in Hudson Street to-morrow, Watson, and meanwhile I should be the criminal myself if I kept you out of bed any longer.”

²⁸⁵It was midday when we found ourselves at the scene of the tragedy, and, under my companion's guidance, we made our way at once to Hudson Street. ²⁸⁶In spite of his capacity for concealing his emotions, I could easily see that Holmes was in a state of suppressed excitement, while I was myself tingling with that half-sporting, half-intellectual pleasure which I invariably experienced when I associated myself with him in his investigations.

²⁸⁷“This is the street,” said he, as we turned into a short thoroughfare lined with plain two-storied brick houses. ²⁸⁸“Ah, here is Simpson to report.”

²⁸⁹“He's in all right, Mr. Holmes,” cried a small street Arab, running up to us.

²⁹⁰“Good, Simpson!” said Holmes, patting him on the head. ²⁹¹“Come along, Watson. ²⁹²This is the house.” ²⁹³He sent in his card with a message that he had come on important business, and a moment later we were face to face with the man whom we had come to see. ²⁹⁴In spite of the warm weather he was crouching over a fire, and the little room was like an oven. ²⁹⁵The man sat all twisted and huddled in his chair in a way which gave an indescribably impression of deformity; but the face which he turned towards us, though worn and swarthy, must at some time have been remarkable for its beauty. ²⁹⁶He looked suspiciously at us now out of yellow-shot, bilious eyes, and, without speaking or rising, he waved towards two chairs.

²⁹⁷“Mr. Henry Wood, late of India, I believe,” said Holmes, affably. ²⁹⁸“I've come over this little matter of Colonel Barclay's death.”

²⁹⁹“What should I know about that?”

³⁰⁰“That's what I want to ascertain. ³⁰¹You know, I suppose, that unless the matter is cleared up, Mrs. Barclay, who is an old friend of yours, will in all probability be tried for murder.”

³⁰²The man gave a violent start.

³⁰³“I don't know who you are,” he cried, “nor how you come to know what you do know, but will you swear that this is true that you tell me?”

³⁰⁴“Why, they are only waiting for her to come to her senses to arrest her.”

³⁰⁵“My God! ³⁰⁶Are you in the police yourself?”

³⁰⁷“No.”

³⁰⁸“What business is it of yours, then?”

³⁰⁹“It's every man's business to see justice done.”

³¹⁰“You can take my word that she is innocent.”

³¹¹“Then you are guilty.”

³¹²“No, I am not.”

³¹³“Who killed Colonel James Barclay, then?”

³¹⁴“It was a just providence that killed him. ³¹⁵But, mind you this, that if I had knocked his brains out, as it was in my heart to do, he would have had no more than his due from my hands. ³¹⁶If his own guilty conscience had not struck him down it is likely enough that I might have had his blood upon my soul. ³¹⁷You want me to tell the story. ³¹⁸Well, I don't know why I shouldn't, for there's no cause for me to be ashamed of it.

³¹⁹“It was in this way, sir. ³²⁰You see me now with my back like a camel and by ribs all awry, but there was a time when Corporal Henry Wood was the smartest man in the 117th foot. ³²¹We were in India then, in cantonments, at a place we'll call Bhurtee. ³²²Barclay, who died the other day, was sergeant in the same company as myself, and the belle of the regiment, ay, and the finest girl that ever had the breath of life between her lips, was Nancy Devoy, the daughter of the color-sergeant. ³²³There were two men that loved her, and one that she loved, and you'll smile when you look at this poor thing huddled before the fire, and hear me say that it was for my good looks that she loved me.

³²⁴“Well, though I had her heart, her father was set upon her marrying Barclay. ³²⁵I was a harum-scarum, reckless lad, and he had had an education, and was already marked for the sword-belt. ³²⁶But the girl held true to me, and it seemed that I would have had her when the Mutiny broke out, and all hell was loose in the country.

³²⁷“We were shut up in Bhurtee, the regiment of us with half a battery of artillery, a company of Sikhs, and a lot of civilians and women-folk. ³²⁸There were ten thousand rebels round us, and they were as keen as a set of terriers round a rat-cage. ³²⁹About the second week of it our water gave out, and it was a question whether we could communicate with General Neill's column, which was moving up country. ³³⁰It was our only chance, for we could not hope to fight our way out with all the women and children, so I volunteered to go out and to warn General Neill of our danger. ³³¹My offer was accepted, and I talked it over with Sergeant Barclay, who was supposed to know the ground better than any other man, and who drew up a route by which I might get through the rebel lines. ³³²At ten o'clock the same night I started off upon my journey. ³³³There were a thousand lives to save, but it was of only one that I was thinking when I dropped over the wall that night.

³³⁴“My way ran down a dried-up watercourse, which we hoped would screen me from the enemy's sentries; but as I crept round the corner of it I walked right into six of them, who were crouching down in the dark waiting for me. ³³⁵In an instant I was stunned with a blow and bound hand and foot. ³³⁶But the real blow was to my heart and not to my head, for as I came to and listened to as much as I could understand of their talk, I heard enough to tell me that my comrade, the very man who had arranged the way that I was to take, had betrayed me by means of a native servant into the hands of the enemy.

³³⁷“Well, there's no need for me to dwell on that part of it. ³³⁸You know now what James Barclay was capable of. ³³⁹Bhurtee was relieved by Neill next day, but the rebels took me away with them in their retreat, and it was many a long year before ever I saw a white face again. ³⁴⁰I was tortured and tried to get away, and was captured and tortured again. ³⁴¹You can see for yourselves the state in which I was left. ³⁴²Some of them that fled into Nepal took me with them, and then afterwards I was up past

Darjeeling. ³⁴³The hill-folk up there murdered the rebels who had me, and I became their slave for a time until I escaped; but instead of going south I had to go north, until I found myself among the Afghans. ³⁴⁴There I wandered about for many a year, and at last came back to the Punjab, where I lived mostly among the natives and picked up a living by the conjuring tricks that I had learned. ³⁴⁵What use was it for me, a wretched cripple, to go back to England or to make myself known to my old comrades? ³⁴⁶Even my wish for revenge would not make me do that. ³⁴⁷I had rather that Nancy and my old pals should think of Harry Wood as having died with a straight back, than see him living and crawling with a stick like a chimpanzee. ³⁴⁸They never doubted that I was dead, and I meant that they never should. ³⁴⁹I heard that Barclay had married Nancy, and that he was rising rapidly in the regiment, but even that did not make me speak.

³⁵⁰"But when one gets old one has a longing for home. ³⁵¹For years I've been dreaming of the bright green fields and the hedges of England. ³⁵²At last I determined to see them before I died. ³⁵³I saved enough to bring me across, and then I came here where the soldiers are, for I know their ways and how to amuse them and so earn enough to keep me."

³⁵⁴"Your narrative is most interesting," said Sherlock Holmes. ³⁵⁵"I have already heard of your meeting with Mrs. Barclay, and your mutual recognition. ³⁵⁶You then, as I understand, followed her home and saw through the window an altercation between her husband and her, in which she doubtless cast his conduct to you in his teeth. ³⁵⁷Your own feelings overcame you, and you ran across the lawn and broke in upon them."

³⁵⁸"I did, sir, and at the sight of me he looked as I have never seen a man look before, and over he went with his head on the fender. ³⁵⁹But he was dead before he fell. I read death on his face as plain as I can read that text over the fire. ³⁶⁰The bare sight of me was like a bullet through his guilty heart."

³⁶¹"And then?"

³⁶²"Then Nancy fainted, and I caught up the key of the door from her hand, intending to unlock it and get help. ³⁶³But as I was doing it it seemed to me better to leave it alone and get away, for the thing might look black against me, and any way my secret would be out if I were taken. ³⁶⁴In my haste I thrust the key into my pocket, and dropped my stick while I was chasing Teddy, who had run up the curtain. ³⁶⁵When I got him into his box, from which he had slipped, I was off as fast as I could run."

³⁶⁶"Who's Teddy?" asked Holmes.

³⁶⁷The man leaned over and pulled up the front of a kind of hutch in the corner. ³⁶⁸In an instant out there slipped a beautiful reddish-brown creature, thin and lithe, with the legs of a stoat, a long, thin nose, and a pair of the finest red eyes that ever I saw in an animal's head.

³⁶⁹"It's a mongoose," I cried.

³⁷⁰"Well, some call them that, and some call them ichneumon," said the man. ³⁷¹"Snake-catcher is what I call them, and Teddy is amazing quick on cobras. ³⁷²I have one here without the fangs, and Teddy catches it every night to please the folk in the canteen.

³⁷³"Any other point, sir?"

³⁷⁴"Well, we may have to apply to you again if Mrs. Barclay should prove to be in serious trouble."

³⁷⁵"In that case, of course, I'd come forward."

³⁷⁶"But if not, there is no object in raking up this scandal against a dead man, foully as he has acted. ³⁷⁷You have at least the satisfaction of knowing that for thirty years of his life his conscience bitterly reproached him for this wicked deed. ³⁷⁸Ah, there goes Major Murphy on the other side of the street. ³⁷⁹Good-bye, Wood. ³⁸⁰I want to learn if anything has happened since yesterday."

³⁸¹We were in time to overtake the major before he reached the corner.

³⁸²“Ah, Holmes,” he said, “I suppose you have heard that all this fuss has come to nothing?”

³⁸³“What then?”

³⁸⁴“The inquest is just over. ³⁸⁵The medical evidence showed conclusively that death was due to apoplexy. ³⁸⁶You see it was quite a simple case after all.”

³⁸⁷“Oh, remarkably superficial,” said Holmes, smiling. ³⁸⁸“Come, Watson, I don't think we shall be wanted in Aldershot any more.”

³⁸⁹“There's one thing,” said I, as we walked down to the station. ³⁹⁰“If the husband's name was James, and the other was Henry, what was this talk about David?”

³⁹¹“That one word, my dear Watson, should have told me the whole story had I been the ideal reasoner which you are so fond of depicting. ³⁹²It was evidently a term of reproach.”

³⁹³“Of reproach?”

³⁹⁴“Yes; David strayed a little occasionally, you know, and on one occasion in the same direction as Sergeant James Barclay. ³⁹⁵You remember the small affair of Uriah and Bathsheba? ³⁹⁶My biblical knowledge is a trifle rusty, I fear, but you will find the story in the first or second of Samuel.”

The Resident Patient

¹Glancing over the somewhat incoherent series of Memoirs with which I have endeavored to illustrate a few of the mental peculiarities of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have been struck by the difficulty which I have experienced in picking out examples which shall in every way answer my purpose. ²For in those cases in which Holmes has performed some tour de force of analytical reasoning, and has demonstrated the value of his peculiar methods of investigation, the facts themselves have often been so slight or so commonplace that I could not feel justified in laying them before the public. ³On the other hand, it has frequently happened that he has been concerned in some research where the facts have been of the most remarkable and dramatic character, but where the share which he has himself taken in determining their causes has been less pronounced than I, as his biographer, could wish. ⁴The small matter which I have chronicled under the heading of “A Study in Scarlet,” and that other later one connected with the loss of the Gloria Scott, may serve as examples of this Scylla and Charybdis which are forever threatening the historian. ⁵It may be that in the business of which I am now about to write the part which my friend played is not sufficiently accentuated; and yet the whole train of circumstances is so remarkable that I cannot bring myself to omit it entirely from this series.

⁶It had been a close, rainy day in October. Our blinds were half-drawn, and Holmes lay curled upon the sofa, reading and re-reading a letter which he had received by the morning post. ⁷For myself, my term of service in India had trained me to stand heat better than cold, and a thermometer of 90 was no hardship. ⁸But the paper was uninteresting. ⁹Parliament had risen. ¹⁰Everybody was out of town, and I yearned for the glades of the New Forest or the shingle of Southsea. ¹¹A depleted bank account had caused me to postpone my holiday, and as to my companion, neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. ¹²He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumor or suspicion of unsolved crime. ¹³Appreciation of Nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.

¹⁴I cannot be sure of the exact date, for some of my memoranda upon the matter have been mislaid, but it must have been towards the end of the first year during which Holmes and I shared chambers in Baker Street. ¹⁵It was boisterous October weather, and we had both remained indoors all day, I because I feared with my shaken health to face the keen autumn wind, while he was deep in some of those abstruse chemical investigations which absorbed him utterly as long as he was engaged upon them. ¹⁶Towards evening, however, the breaking of a test-tube brought his research to a premature ending, and he sprang up from his chair with an exclamation of impatience and a clouded brow.

¹⁷“A day's work ruined, Watson,” said he, striding across to the window. ¹⁸“Ha! The stars are out and the wind has fallen. ¹⁹What do you say to a ramble through London?”

²⁰I was weary of our little sitting-room and gladly acquiesced. ²¹For three hours we strolled about together, watching the ever-changing kaleidoscope of life as it ebbs and flows through Fleet Street and the Strand. ²²His characteristic talk, with its keen observance of detail and subtle power of inference held me amused and enthralled. ²³It was ten o'clock before we reached Baker Street again. ²⁴A brougham was waiting at our door.

²⁵“Hum! ²⁶A doctor's—general practitioner, I perceive,” said Holmes. ²⁷“Not been long in practice, but has had a good deal to do. ²⁸Come to consult us, I fancy! ²⁹Lucky we came back!”

³⁰I was sufficiently conversant with Holmes's methods to be able to follow his reasoning, and to see that the nature and state of the various medical instruments in the wicker basket which hung in the lamplight inside the brougham had given him the data for his swift deduction. ³¹The light in our window above

showed that this late visit was indeed intended for us. ³²With some curiosity as to what could have sent a brother medico to us at such an hour, I followed Holmes into our sanctum.

³³A pale, taper-faced man with sandy whiskers rose up from a chair by the fire as we entered. ³⁴His age may not have been more than three or four and thirty, but his haggard expression and unhealthy hue told of a life which has sapped his strength and robbed him of his youth. ³⁴His manner was nervous and shy, like that of a sensitive gentleman, and the thin white hand which he laid on the mantelpiece as he rose was that of an artist rather than of a surgeon. ³⁵His dress was quiet and sombre—a black frock-coat, dark trousers, and a touch of color about his necktie.

³⁶“Good-evening, doctor,” said Holmes, cheerily. ³⁷“I am glad to see that you have only been waiting a very few minutes.”

³⁸“You spoke to my coachman, then?”

³⁹“No, it was the candle on the side-table that told me. ⁴⁰Pray resume your seat and let me know how I can serve you.”

⁴¹“My name is Doctor Percy Trevelyan,” said our visitor, “and I live at 403 Brook Street.”

⁴²“Are you not the author of a monograph upon obscure nervous lesions?” I asked.

⁴³His pale cheeks flushed with pleasure at hearing that his work was known to me.

⁴⁴“I so seldom hear of the work that I thought it was quite dead,” said he. ⁴⁵“My publishers gave me a most discouraging account of its sale. ⁴⁶You are yourself, I presume, a medical man?”

⁴⁷“A retired army surgeon.”

⁴⁸“My own hobby has always been nervous disease. ⁴⁹I should wish to make it an absolute specialty, but, of course, a man must take what he can get at first. ⁵⁰This, however, is beside the question, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I quite appreciate how valuable your time is. ⁵¹The fact is that a very singular train of events has occurred recently at my house in Brook Street, and to-night they came to such a head that I felt it was quite impossible for me to wait another hour before asking for your advice and assistance.”

⁵²Sherlock Holmes sat down and lit his pipe. ⁵³“You are very welcome to both,” said he. ⁵⁴“Pray let me have a detailed account of what the circumstances are which have disturbed you.”

⁵⁵“One or two of them are so trivial,” said Dr. Trevelyan, “that really I am almost ashamed to mention them. ⁵⁶But the matter is so inexplicable, and the recent turn which it has taken is so elaborate, that I shall lay it all before you, and you shall judge what is essential and what is not.

⁵⁷“I am compelled, to begin with, to say something of my own college career. ⁵⁸I am a London University man, you know, and I am sure that you will not think that I am unduly singing my own praises if I say that my student career was considered by my professors to be a very promising one. ⁵⁹After I had graduated I continued to devote myself to research, occupying a minor position in King's College Hospital, and I was fortunate enough to excite considerable interest by my research into the pathology of catalepsy, and finally to win the Bruce Pinkerton prize and medal by the monograph on nervous lesions to which your friend has just alluded. ⁶⁰I should not go too far if I were to say that there was a general impression at that time that a distinguished career lay before me.

⁶¹“But the one great stumbling-block lay in my want of capital. ⁶²As you will readily understand, a specialist who aims high is compelled to start in one of a dozen streets in the Cavendish Square quarter, all of which entail enormous rents and furnishing expenses. ⁶³Besides this preliminary outlay, he must be prepared to keep himself for some years, and to hire a presentable carriage and horse. ⁶⁴To do this

was quite beyond my power, and I could only hope that by economy I might in ten years' time save enough to enable me to put up my plate. ⁶⁵Suddenly, however, an unexpected incident opened up quite a new prospect to me.

⁶⁶“This was a visit from a gentleman of the name of Blessington, who was a complete stranger to me.

⁶⁷He came up to my room one morning, and plunged into business in an instant.

⁶⁸“You are the same Percy Trevelyan who has had so distinguished a career and won a great prize lately?” said he.

⁶⁹“I bowed.

⁷⁰“Answer me frankly,” he continued, “for you will find it to your interest to do so. ⁷¹You have all the cleverness which makes a successful man. ⁷²Have you the tact?”

⁷³“I could not help smiling at the abruptness of the question.

⁷⁴“I trust that I have my share,” I said.

⁷⁵“Any bad habits? ⁷⁶Not drawn towards drink, eh?”

⁷⁷“Really, sir!” I cried.

⁷⁸“Quite right! ⁷⁹That's all right! ⁸⁰But I was bound to ask. ⁸¹With all these qualities, why are you not in practice?”

⁸²“I shrugged my shoulders.

⁸³“Come, come!” said he, in his bustling way. ⁸⁴“It's the old story. ⁸⁵More in your brains than in your pocket, eh? ⁸⁶What would you say if I were to start you in Brook Street?”

⁸⁷“I stared at him in astonishment.

⁸⁸“Oh, it's for my sake, not for yours,” he cried. ⁸⁹“I'll be perfectly frank with you, and if it suits you it will suit me very well. ⁹⁰I have a few thousands to invest, d'ye see, and I think I'll sink them in you.”

⁹¹“But why?” I gasped.

⁹²“Well, it's just like any other speculation, and safer than most.”

⁹³“What am I to do, then?”

⁹⁴“I'll tell you. ⁹⁵I'll take the house, furnish it, pay the maids, and run the whole place. ⁹⁶All you have to do is just to wear out your chair in the consulting-room. ⁹⁷I'll let you have pocket-money and everything. ⁹⁸Then you hand over to me three quarters of what you earn, and you keep the other quarter for yourself.”

⁹⁹“This was the strange proposal, Mr. Holmes, with which the man Blessington approached me. ¹⁰⁰I won't weary you with the account of how we bargained and negotiated. ¹⁰¹It ended in my moving into the house next Lady Day, and starting in practice on very much the same conditions as he had suggested. ¹⁰²He came himself to live with me in the character of a resident patient. ¹⁰³His heart was weak, it appears, and he needed constant medical supervision. ¹⁰⁴He turned the two best rooms of the first floor into a sitting-room and bedroom for himself. ¹⁰⁵He was a man of singular habits, shunning company and very seldom going out. ¹⁰⁶His life was irregular, but in one respect he was regularity itself. ¹⁰⁷Every evening, at the same hour, he walked into the consulting-room, examined the books, put down five and three-pence for every guinea that I had earned, and carried the rest off to the strong-box in his own room.

¹⁰⁸“I may say with confidence that he never had occasion to regret his speculation. ¹⁰⁹From the first it was a success. ¹¹⁰A few good cases and the reputation which I had won in the hospital brought me rapidly to the front, and during the last few years I have made him a rich man.

¹¹¹“So much, Mr. Holmes, for my past history and my relations with Mr. Blessington. ¹¹²It only remains for me now to tell you what has occurred to bring me here to-night.

¹¹³“Some weeks ago Mr. Blessington came down to me in, as it seemed to me, a state of considerable agitation. ¹¹⁴He spoke of some burglary which, he said, had been committed in the West End, and he appeared, I remember, to be quite unnecessarily excited about it, declaring that a day should not pass before we should add stronger bolts to our windows and doors. ¹¹⁵For a week he continued to be in a peculiar state of restlessness, peering continually out of the windows, and ceasing to take the short walk which had usually been the prelude to his dinner. ¹¹⁶From his manner it struck me that he was in mortal dread of something or somebody, but when I questioned him upon the point he became so offensive that I was compelled to drop the subject. ¹¹⁷Gradually, as time passed, his fears appeared to die away, and he had renewed his former habits, when a fresh event reduced him to the pitiable state of prostration in which he now lies.

¹¹⁸“What happened was this. ¹¹⁹Two days ago I received the letter which I now read to you. ¹²⁰Neither address nor date is attached to it.

¹²¹“‘A Russian nobleman who is now resident in England,’ it runs, ‘would be glad to avail himself of the professional assistance of Dr. Percy Trevelyan. ¹²²He has been for some years a victim to cataleptic attacks, on which, as is well known, Dr. Trevelyan is an authority. ¹²³He proposes to call at about quarter past six to-morrow evening, if Dr. Trevelyan will make it convenient to be at home.’

¹²⁴“This letter interested me deeply, because the chief difficulty in the study of catalepsy is the rareness of the disease. ¹²⁵You may believe, then, that I was in my consulting-room when, at the appointed hour, the page showed in the patient.

¹²⁶He was an elderly man, thin, demure, and common-place—by no means the conception one forms of a Russian nobleman. ¹²⁷I was much more struck by the appearance of his companion. ¹²⁸This was a tall young man, surprisingly handsome, with a dark, fierce face, and the limbs and chest of a Hercules. ¹²⁹He had his hand under the other's arm as they entered, and helped him to a chair with a tenderness which one would hardly have expected from his appearance.

¹³⁰“‘You will excuse my coming in, doctor,’ said he to me, speaking English with a slight lisp. ¹³¹‘This is my father, and his health is a matter of the most overwhelming importance to me.’

¹³²“I was touched by this filial anxiety. ¹³³‘You would, perhaps, care to remain during the consultation?’ said I.

¹³⁴“‘Not for the world,’ he cried with a gesture of horror. ¹³⁵‘It is more painful to me than I can express. ¹³⁶If I were to see my father in one of these dreadful seizures I am convinced that I should never survive it. ¹³⁷My own nervous system is an exceptionally sensitive one. ¹³⁸With your permission, I will remain in the waiting-room while you go into my father's case.’

¹³⁹“To this, of course, I assented, and the young man withdrew. ¹⁴⁰The patient and I then plunged into a discussion of his case, of which I took exhaustive notes. ¹⁴¹He was not remarkable for intelligence, and his answers were frequently obscure, which I attributed to his limited acquaintance with our language. ¹⁴²Suddenly, however, as I sat writing, he ceased to give any answer at all to my inquiries, and on my turning towards him I was shocked to see that he was sitting bolt upright in his chair, staring at me with a perfectly blank and rigid face. ¹⁴³He was again in the grip of his mysterious malady.

¹⁴⁴“My first feeling, as I have just said, was one of pity and horror. ¹⁴⁵My second, I fear, was rather one of professional satisfaction. ¹⁴⁶I made notes of my patient's pulse and temperature, tested the rigidity of his muscles, and examined his reflexes. ¹⁴⁷There was nothing markedly abnormal in any of these conditions, which harmonized with my former experiences. ¹⁴⁸I had obtained good results in such cases by the inhalation of nitrite of amyl, and the present seemed an admirable opportunity of testing its virtues. ¹⁴⁹The bottle was downstairs in my laboratory, so leaving my patient seated in his chair, I ran down to get it. ¹⁵⁰There was some little delay in finding it—five minutes, let us say—and then I returned. ¹⁵¹Imagine my amazement to find the room empty and the patient gone.

¹⁵²“Of course, my first act was to run into the waiting-room. ¹⁵³The son had gone also. ¹⁵⁴The hall door had been closed, but not shut. ¹⁵⁵My page who admits patients is a new boy and by no means quick. ¹⁵⁶He waits downstairs, and runs up to show patients out when I ring the consulting-room bell. ¹⁵⁷He had heard nothing, and the affair remained a complete mystery. ¹⁵⁸Mr. Blessington came in from his walk shortly afterwards, but I did not say anything to him upon the subject, for, to tell the truth, I have got in the way of late of holding as little communication with him as possible.

¹⁵⁹“Well, I never thought that I should see anything more of the Russian and his son, so you can imagine my amazement when, at the very same hour this evening, they both came marching into my consulting-room, just as they had done before.

¹⁶⁰“‘I feel that I owe you a great many apologies for my abrupt departure yesterday, doctor,’ said my patient.

¹⁶¹“‘I confess that I was very much surprised at it,’ said I.

¹⁶²“‘Well, the fact is,’ he remarked, ‘that when I recover from these attacks my mind is always very clouded as to all that has gone before. ¹⁶³I woke up in a strange room, as it seemed to me, and made my way out into the street in a sort of dazed way when you were absent.’

¹⁶⁴“‘And I,’ said the son, ‘seeing my father pass the door of the waiting-room, naturally thought that the consultation had come to an end. ¹⁶⁵It was not until we had reached home that I began to realize the true state of affairs.’

¹⁶⁶“‘Well,’ said I, laughing, ‘there is no harm done except that you puzzled me terribly; so if you, sir, would kindly step into the waiting-room I shall be happy to continue our consultation which was brought to so abrupt an ending.’

¹⁶⁷“For half an hour or so I discussed that old gentleman's symptoms with him, and then, having prescribed for him, I saw him go off upon the arm of his son.

¹⁶⁸“I have told you that Mr. Blessington generally chose this hour of the day for his exercise. ¹⁶⁹He came in shortly afterwards and passed upstairs. ¹⁷⁰An instant later I heard him running down, and he burst into my consulting-room like a man who is mad with panic.

¹⁷¹“‘Who has been in my room?’ he cried.

¹⁷²“‘No one,’ said I.

¹⁷³“‘It's a lie!’ he yelled. ¹⁷⁴‘Come up and look!’

¹⁷⁵“I passed over the grossness of his language, as he seemed half out of his mind with fear. ¹⁷⁶When I went upstairs with him he pointed to several footprints upon the light carpet.

¹⁷⁷“‘D'you mean to say those are mine?’ he cried.

¹⁷⁸“They were certainly very much larger than any which he could have made, and were evidently quite fresh. ¹⁷⁹It rained hard this afternoon, as you know, and my patients were the only people who called.

¹⁸⁰It must have been the case, then, that the man in the waiting-room had, for some unknown reason, while I was busy with the other, ascended to the room of my resident patient. ¹⁸¹Nothing has been touched or taken, but there were the footprints to prove that the intrusion was an undoubted fact.

¹⁸²“Mr. Blessington seemed more excited over the matter than I should have thought possible, though of course it was enough to disturb anybody's peace of mind. ¹⁸³He actually sat crying in an arm-chair, and I could hardly get him to speak coherently. ¹⁸⁴It was his suggestion that I should come round to you, and of course I at once saw the propriety of it, for certainly the incident is a very singular one, though he appears to completely overrate its importance. ¹⁸⁵If you would only come back with me in my brougham, you would at least be able to soothe him, though I can hardly hope that you will be able to explain this remarkable occurrence.”

¹⁸⁶Sherlock Holmes had listened to this long narrative with an intentness which showed me that his interest was keenly aroused. ¹⁸⁷His face was as impassive as ever, but his lids had drooped more heavily over his eyes, and his smoke had curled up more thickly from his pipe to emphasize each curious episode in the doctor's tale. ¹⁸⁸As our visitor concluded, Holmes sprang up without a word, handed me my hat, picked his own from the table, and followed Dr. Trevelyan to the door. ¹⁸⁹Within a quarter of an hour we had been dropped at the door of the physician's residence in Brook Street, one of those sombre, flat-faced houses which one associates with a West-End practice. ¹⁹⁰A small page admitted us, and we began at once to ascend the broad, well-carpeted stair.

¹⁹¹But a singular interruption brought us to a standstill. ¹⁹²The light at the top was suddenly whisked out, and from the darkness came a reedy, quivering voice.

¹⁹³“I have a pistol,” it cried. ¹⁹⁴“I give you my word that I'll fire if you come any nearer.”

¹⁹⁵“This really grows outrageous, Mr. Blessington,” cried Dr. Trevelyan.

¹⁹⁶“Oh, then it is you, doctor,” said the voice, with a great heave of relief. ¹⁹⁷“But those other gentlemen, are they what they pretend to be?”

¹⁹⁸We were conscious of a long scrutiny out of the darkness.

¹⁹⁹“Yes, yes, it's all right,” said the voice at last. ²⁰⁰“You can come up, and I am sorry if my precautions have annoyed you.”

²⁰¹He relit the stair gas as he spoke, and we saw before us a singular-looking man, whose appearance, as well as his voice, testified to his jangled nerves. ²⁰²He was very fat, but had apparently at some time been much fatter, so that the skin hung about his face in loose pouches, like the cheeks of a blood-hound. ²⁰³He was of a sickly color, and his thin, sandy hair seemed to bristle up with the intensity of his emotion. ²⁰⁴In his hand he held a pistol, but he thrust it into his pocket as we advanced.

²⁰⁵“Good-evening, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ²⁰⁶“I am sure I am very much obliged to you for coming round. ²⁰⁷No one ever needed your advice more than I do. ²⁰⁸I suppose that Dr. Trevelyan has told you of this most unwarrantable intrusion into my rooms.”

²⁰⁹“Quite so,” said Holmes. ²¹⁰“Who are these two men Mr. Blessington, and why do they wish to molest you?”

²¹¹“Well, well,” said the resident patient, in a nervous fashion, “of course it is hard to say that. ²¹²You can hardly expect me to answer that, Mr. Holmes.”

²¹³“Do you mean that you don't know?”

²¹⁴“Come in here, if you please. ²¹⁵Just have the kindness to step in here.”

²¹⁶He led the way into his bedroom, which was large and comfortably furnished.

²¹⁷“You see that,” said he, pointing to a big black box at the end of his bed. ²¹⁸“I have never been a very rich man, Mr. Holmes—never made but one investment in my life, as Dr. Trevelyan would tell you. ²¹⁹But I don't believe in bankers. ²²⁰I would never trust a banker, Mr. Holmes. Between ourselves, what little I have is in that box, so you can understand what it means to me when unknown people force themselves into my rooms.”

²²¹Holmes looked at Blessington in his questioning way and shook his head.

²²²“I cannot possibly advise you if you try to deceive me,” said he.

²²³“But I have told you everything.”

²²⁴Holmes turned on his heel with a gesture of disgust. ²²⁵“Good-night, Dr. Trevelyan,” said he.

²²⁶“And no advice for me?” cried Blessington, in a breaking voice.

²²⁷“My advice to you, sir, is to speak the truth.”

²²⁸A minute later we were in the street and walking for home. ²²⁹We had crossed Oxford Street and were half way down Harley Street before I could get a word from my companion.

²³⁰“Sorry to bring you out on such a fool's errand, Watson,” he said at last. ²³¹“It is an interesting case, too, at the bottom of it.”

²³²“I can make little of it,” I confessed.

²³³“Well, it is quite evident that there are two men—more, perhaps, but at least two—who are determined for some reason to get at this fellow Blessington. ²³⁴I have no doubt in my mind that both on the first and on the second occasion that young man penetrated to Blessington's room, while his confederate, by an ingenious device, kept the doctor from interfering.”

²³⁵“And the catalepsy?”

²³⁶“A fraudulent imitation, Watson, though I should hardly dare to hint as much to our specialist. ²³⁷It is a very easy complaint to imitate. ²³⁸I have done it myself.”

²³⁹“And then?”

²⁴⁰“By the purest chance Blessington was out on each occasion. ²⁴¹Their reason for choosing so unusual an hour for a consultation was obviously to insure that there should be no other patient in the waiting-room. ²⁴²It just happened, however, that this hour coincided with Blessington's constitutional, which seems to show that they were not very well acquainted with his daily routine. ²⁴³Of course, if they had been merely after plunder they would at least have made some attempt to search for it. ²⁴⁴Besides, I can read in a man's eye when it is his own skin that he is frightened for. ²⁴⁵It is inconceivable that this fellow could have made two such vindictive enemies as these appear to be without knowing of it. ²⁴⁶I hold it, therefore, to be certain that he does know who these men are, and that for reasons of his own he suppresses it. ²⁴⁷It is just possible that to-morrow may find him in a more communicative mood.”

²⁴⁸“Is there not one alternative,” I suggested, “grotesquely improbably, no doubt, but still just conceivable? ²⁴⁹Might the whole story of the cataleptic Russian and his son be a concoction of Dr. Trevelyan's, who has, for his own purposes, been in Blessington's rooms?”

²⁵⁰I saw in the gaslight that Holmes wore an amused smile at this brilliant departure of mine.

²⁵¹“My dear fellow,” said he, “it was one of the first solutions which occurred to me, but I was soon able to corroborate the doctor's tale. ²⁵²This young man has left prints upon the stair-carpet which made it quite superfluous for me to ask to see those which he had made in the room. ²⁵³When I tell you that his shoes were square-toed instead of being pointed like Blessington's, and were quite an inch and a

third longer than the doctor's, you will acknowledge that there can be no doubt as to his individuality.
²⁵⁴But we may sleep on it now, for I shall be surprised if we do not hear something further from Brook Street in the morning.”

²⁵⁵Sherlock Holmes's prophecy was soon fulfilled, and in a dramatic fashion. ²⁵⁶At half-past seven next morning, in the first glimmer of daylight, I found him standing by my bedside in his dressing-gown.

²⁵⁷“There's a brougham waiting for us, Watson,” said he.

²⁵⁸“What's the matter, then?”

²⁵⁹“The Brook Street business.”

²⁶⁰“Any fresh news?”

²⁶¹“Tragic, but ambiguous,” said he, pulling up the blind. ²⁶²“Look at this—a sheet from a note-book, with ‘For God's sake come at once—P. T.,’ scrawled upon it in pencil. ²⁶³Our friend, the doctor, was hard put to it when he wrote this. ²⁶⁴Come along, my dear fellow, for it's an urgent call.”

²⁶⁵In a quarter of an hour or so we were back at the physician's house. ²⁶⁶He came running out to meet us with a face of horror.

²⁶⁷“Oh, such a business!” he cried, with his hands to his temples.

²⁶⁸“What then?”

²⁶⁹“Blessington has committed suicide!”

²⁷⁰Holmes whistled.

²⁷¹“Yes, he hanged himself during the night.”

²⁷²We had entered, and the doctor had preceded us into what was evidently his waiting-room.

²⁷³“I really hardly know what I am doing,” he cried. ²⁷⁴“The police are already upstairs. ²⁷⁵It has shaken me most dreadfully.”

²⁷⁶“When did you find it out?”

²⁷⁷“He has a cup of tea taken in to him early every morning. ²⁷⁸When the maid entered, about seven, there the unfortunate fellow was hanging in the middle of the room. ²⁷⁹He had tied his cord to the hook on which the heavy lamp used to hang, and he had jumped off from the top of the very box that he showed us yesterday.”

²⁸⁰Holmes stood for a moment in deep thought.

²⁸¹“With your permission,” said he at last, “I should like to go upstairs and look into the matter.”

²⁸²We both ascended, followed by the doctor.

²⁸³It was a dreadful sight which met us as we entered the bedroom door. ²⁸⁴I have spoken of the impression of flabbiness which this man Blessington conveyed. ²⁸⁵As he dangled from the hook it was exaggerated and intensified until he was scarce human in his appearance. ²⁸⁶The neck was drawn out like a plucked chicken's, making the rest of him seem the more obese and unnatural by the contrast. ²⁸⁷He was clad only in his long night-dress, and his swollen ankles and ungainly feet protruded starkly from beneath it. ²⁸⁸Beside him stood a smart-looking police-inspector, who was taking notes in a pocket-book.

²⁸⁹“Ah, Mr. Holmes,” said he, heartily, as my friend entered, “I am delighted to see you.”

²⁹⁰“Good-morning, Lanner,” answered Holmes; “you won't think me an intruder, I am sure. ²⁹¹Have you heard of the events which led up to this affair?”

²⁹²“Yes, I heard something of them.”

²⁹³“Have you formed any opinion?”

²⁹⁴“As far as I can see, the man has been driven out of his senses by fright. ²⁹⁵The bed has been well slept in, you see. ²⁹⁶There's his impression deep enough. ²⁹⁷It's about five in the morning, you know, that suicides are most common. ²⁹⁸That would be about his time for hanging himself. ²⁹⁹It seems to have been a very deliberate affair.”

³⁰⁰“I should say that he has been dead about three hours, judging by the rigidity of the muscles,” said I.

³⁰¹“Noticed anything peculiar about the room?” asked Holmes.

³⁰²“Found a screw-driver and some screws on the wash-hand stand. ³⁰³Seems to have smoked heavily during the night, too. ³⁰⁴Here are four cigar-ends that I picked out of the fireplace.”

³⁰⁵“Hum!” said Holmes, “have you got his cigar-holder?”

³⁰⁶“No, I have seen none.”

³⁰⁷“His cigar-case, then?”

³⁰⁸“Yes, it was in his coat-pocket.”

³⁰⁹Holmes opened it and smelled the single cigar which it contained.

³¹⁰“Oh, this is an Havana, and these others are cigars of the peculiar sort which are imported by the Dutch from their East Indian colonies. ³¹¹They are usually wrapped in straw, you know, and are thinner for their length than any other brand.” ³¹²He picked up the four ends and examined them with his pocket-lens.

³¹³“Two of these have been smoked from a holder and two without,” said he. ³¹⁴“Two have been cut by a not very sharp knife, and two have had the ends bitten off by a set of excellent teeth. ³¹⁵This is no suicide, Mr. Lanner. ³¹⁶It is a very deeply planned and cold-blooded murder.”

³¹⁷“Impossible!” cried the inspector.

³¹⁸“And why?”

³¹⁹“Why should any one murder a man in so clumsy a fashion as by hanging him?”

³²⁰“That is what we have to find out.”

³²¹“How could they get in?”

³²²“Through the front door.”

³²³“It was barred in the morning.”

³²⁴“Then it was barred after them.”

³²⁵“How do you know?”

³²⁶“I saw their traces. ³²⁷Excuse me a moment, and I may be able to give you some further information about it.”

³²⁸He went over to the door, and turning the lock he examined it in his methodical way. ³²⁹Then he took out the key, which was on the inside, and inspected that also. ³³⁰The bed, the carpet, the chairs the

mantelpiece, the dead body, and the rope were each in turn examined, until at last he professed himself satisfied, and with my aid and that of the inspector cut down the wretched object and laid it reverently under a sheet.

³³¹“How about this rope?” he asked.

³³²“It is cut off this,” said Dr. Trevelyan, drawing a large coil from under the bed. ³³³“He was morbidly nervous of fire, and always kept this beside him, so that he might escape by the window in case the stairs were burning.”

³³⁴“That must have saved them trouble,” said Holmes, thoughtfully. ³³⁵“Yes, the actual facts are very plain, and I shall be surprised if by the afternoon I cannot give you the reasons for them as well. ³³⁶I will take this photograph of Blessington, which I see upon the mantelpiece, as it may help me in my inquiries.”

³³⁷“But you have told us nothing!” cried the doctor.

³³⁸“Oh, there can be no doubt as to the sequence of events,” said Holmes. ³³⁹“There were three of them in it: the young man, the old man, and a third, to whose identity I have no clue. ³⁴⁰The first two, I need hardly remark, are the same who masqueraded as the Russian count and his son, so we can give a very full description of them. ³⁴¹They were admitted by a confederate inside the house. ³⁴²If I might offer you a word of advice, Inspector, it would be to arrest the page, who, as I understand, has only recently come into your service, Doctor.”

³⁴³“The young imp cannot be found,” said Dr. Trevelyan; “the maid and the cook have just been searching for him.”

³⁴⁴Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

³⁴⁵“He has played a not unimportant part in this drama,” said he. ³⁴⁶“The three men having ascended the stairs, which they did on tiptoe, the elder man first, the younger man second, and the unknown man in the rear—”

³⁴⁷“My dear Holmes!” I ejaculated.

³⁴⁸“Oh, there could be no question as to the superimposing of the footmarks. ³⁴⁹I had the advantage of learning which was which last night. ³⁵⁰They ascended, then, to Mr. Blessington's room, the door of which they found to be locked. ³⁵¹With the help of a wire, however, they forced round the key. ³⁵²Even without the lens you will perceive, by the scratches on this ward, where the pressure was applied.

³⁵³“On entering the room their first proceeding must have been to gag Mr. Blessington. ³⁵⁴He may have been asleep, or he may have been so paralyzed with terror as to have been unable to cry out. ³⁵⁵These walls are thick, and it is conceivable that his shriek, if he had time to utter one, was unheard.

³⁵⁶“Having secured him, it is evident to me that a consultation of some sort was held. ³⁵⁷Probably it was something in the nature of a judicial proceeding. ³⁵⁸It must have lasted for some time, for it was then that these cigars were smoked. ³⁵⁹The older man sat in that wicker chair; it was he who used the cigar-holder. ³⁶⁰The younger man sat over yonder; he knocked his ash off against the chest of drawers. ³⁶¹The third fellow paced up and down. ³⁶²Blessington, I think, sat upright in the bed, but of that I cannot be absolutely certain.

³⁶³“Well, it ended by their taking Blessington and hanging him. ³⁶⁴The matter was so prearranged that it is my belief that they brought with them some sort of block or pulley which might serve as a gallows. ³⁶⁵That screw-driver and those screws were, as I conceive, for fixing it up. ³⁶⁶Seeing the hook, however they naturally saved themselves the trouble. ³⁶⁷Having finished their work they made off, and the door was barred behind them by their confederate.”

³⁶⁸We had all listened with the deepest interest to this sketch of the night's doings, which Holmes had deduced from signs so subtle and minute that, even when he had pointed them out to us, we could scarcely follow him in his reasoning. ³⁶⁹The inspector hurried away on the instant to make inquiries about the page, while Holmes and I returned to Baker Street for breakfast.

³⁷⁰"I'll be back by three," said he, when we had finished our meal. ³⁷¹"Both the inspector and the doctor will meet me here at that hour, and I hope by that time to have cleared up any little obscurity which the case may still present."

³⁷²Our visitors arrived at the appointed time, but it was a quarter to four before my friend put in an appearance. ³⁷³From his expression as he entered, however, I could see that all had gone well with him.

³⁷⁴"Any news, Inspector?"

³⁷⁵"We have got the boy, sir."

³⁷⁶"Excellent, and I have got the men."

³⁷⁷"You have got them!" we cried, all three.

³⁷⁸"Well, at least I have got their identity. ³⁷⁹This so-called Blessington is, as I expected, well known at headquarters, and so are his assailants. ³⁸⁰Their names are Biddle, Hayward, and Moffat."

³⁸¹"The Worthingdon bank gang," cried the inspector.

³⁸²"Precisely," said Holmes.

³⁸³"Then Blessington must have been Sutton."

³⁸⁴"Exactly," said Holmes.

³⁸⁵"Why, that makes it as clear as crystal," said the inspector.

³⁸⁶But Trevelyan and I looked at each other in bewilderment.

³⁸⁷"You must surely remember the great Worthingdon bank business," said Holmes. ³⁸⁸"Five men were in it—these four and a fifth called Cartwright. ³⁸⁹Tobin, the care-taker, was murdered, and the thieves got away with seven thousand pounds. ³⁹⁰This was in 1875. ³⁹¹They were all five arrested, but the evidence against them was by no means conclusive. ³⁹²This Blessington or Sutton, who was the worst of the gang, turned informer. ³⁹³On his evidence Cartwright was hanged and the other three got fifteen years apiece. ³⁹⁴When they got out the other day, which was some years before their full term, they set themselves, as you perceive, to hunt down the traitor and to avenge the death of their comrade upon him. ³⁹⁵Twice they tried to get at him and failed; a third time, you see, it came off. ³⁹⁶Is there anything further which I can explain, Dr. Trevelyan?"

³⁹⁷"I think you have made it all remarkable clear," said the doctor. ³⁹⁸"No doubt the day on which he was perturbed was the day when he had seen of their release in the newspapers."

³⁹⁹"Quite so. ⁴⁰⁰His talk about a burglary was the merest blind."

⁴⁰¹"But why could he not tell you this?"

⁴⁰²"Well, my dear sir, knowing the vindictive character of his old associates, he was trying to hide his own identity from everybody as long as he could. ⁴⁰³His secret was a shameful one, and he could not bring himself to divulge it. ⁴⁰⁴However, wretch as he was, he was still living under the shield of British law, and I have no doubt, Inspector, that you will see that, though that shield may fail to guard, the sword of justice is still there to avenge."

⁴⁰⁵Such were the singular circumstances in connection with the Resident Patient and the Brook Street Doctor. ⁴⁰⁶From that night nothing has been seen of the three murderers by the police, and it is surmised at Scotland Yard that they were among the passengers of the ill-fated steamer *Norah Creina*, which was lost some years ago with all hands upon the Portuguese coast, some leagues to the north of Oporto. ⁴⁰⁷The proceedings against the page broke down for want of evidence, and the Brook Street Mystery, as it was called, has never until now been fully dealt with in any public print.

The Greek Interpreter

¹During my long and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Sherlock Holmes I had never heard him refer to his relations, and hardly ever to his own early life. ²This reticence upon his part had increased the somewhat inhuman effect which he produced upon me, until sometimes I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was pre-eminent in intelligence. ³His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character, but not more so than his complete suppression of every reference to his own people. ⁴I had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living, but one day, to my very great surprise, he began to talk to me about his brother.

⁵It was after tea on a summer evening, and the conversation, which had roamed in a desultory, spasmodic fashion from golf clubs to the causes of the change in the obliquity of the ecliptic, came round at last to the question of atavism and hereditary aptitudes. ⁶The point under discussion was, how far any singular gift in an individual was due to his ancestry and how far to his own early training.

⁷"In your own case," said I, "from all that you have told me, it seems obvious that your faculty of observation and your peculiar facility for deduction are due to your own systematic training."

⁸"To some extent," he answered, thoughtfully. ⁹"My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class. ¹⁰But, none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. ¹¹Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms."

¹²"But how do you know that it is hereditary?"

¹³"Because my brother Mycroft possesses it in a larger degree than I do."

¹⁴This was news to me indeed. ¹⁵If there were another man with such singular powers in England, how was it that neither police nor public had heard of him? ¹⁶I put the question, with a hint that it was my companion's modesty which made him acknowledge his brother as his superior. ¹⁷Holmes laughed at my suggestion.

¹⁸"My dear Watson," said he, "I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. ¹⁹To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers. ²⁰When I say, therefore, that Mycroft has better powers of observation than I, you may take it that I am speaking the exact and literal truth."

²¹"Is he your junior?"

²²"Seven years my senior."

²³"How comes it that he is unknown?"

²⁴"Oh, he is very well known in his own circle."

²⁵"Where, then?"

²⁶"Well, in the Diogenes Club, for example."

²⁷I had never heard of the institution, and my face must have proclaimed as much, for Sherlock Holmes pulled out his watch.

²⁸“The Diogenes Club is the queerest club in London, and Mycroft one of the queerest men. ²⁹He's always there from quarter to five to twenty to eight. ³⁰It's six now, so if you care for a stroll this beautiful evening I shall be very happy to introduce you to two curiosities.”

³¹Five minutes later we were in the street, walking towards Regent's Circus.

³²“You wonder,” said my companion, “why it is that Mycroft does not use his powers for detective work. ³³He is incapable of it.”

³⁴“But I thought you said—”

³⁵“I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. ³⁶If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. ³⁷But he has no ambition and no energy. ³⁸He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solution, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. ³⁹Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. ⁴⁰And yet he was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury.”

⁴¹“It is not his profession, then?”

⁴²“By no means. ⁴³What is to me a means of livelihood is to him the merest hobby of a dilettante. ⁴⁴He has an extraordinary faculty for figures, and audits the books in some of the government departments. ⁴⁵Mycroft lodges in Pall Mall, and he walks round the corner into Whitehall every morning and back every evening. ⁴⁶From year's end to year's end he takes no other exercise, and is seen nowhere else, except only in the Diogenes Club, which is just opposite his rooms.”

⁴⁷“I cannot recall the name.”

⁴⁸“Very likely not. ⁴⁹There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. ⁵⁰Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. ⁵¹It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsociable and unclubable men in town. ⁵²No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. ⁵³Save in the Stranger's Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. ⁵⁴My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere.”

⁵⁵We had reached Pall Mall as we talked, and were walking down it from the St. James's end. ⁵⁶Sherlock Holmes stopped at a door some little distance from the Carlton, and, cautioning me not to speak, he led the way into the hall. ⁵⁷Through the glass paneling I caught a glimpse of a large and luxurious room, in which a considerable number of men were sitting about and reading papers, each in his own little nook. ⁵⁸Holmes showed me into a small chamber which looked out into Pall Mall, and then, leaving me for a minute, he came back with a companion whom I knew could only be his brother.

⁵⁹Mycroft Holmes was a much larger and stouter man than Sherlock. ⁶⁰His body was absolutely corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in that of his brother. ⁶¹His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light, watery gray, seemed to always retain that far-away, introspective look which I had only observed in Sherlock's when he was exerting his full powers.

⁶²“I am glad to meet you, sir,” said he, putting out a broad, fat hand like the flipper of a seal. ⁶³“I hear of Sherlock everywhere since you became his chronicler. ⁶⁴By the way, Sherlock, I expected to see you round last week, to consult me over that Manor House case. ⁶⁵I thought you might be a little out of your depth.”

⁶⁶“No, I solved it,” said my friend, smiling.

⁶⁷“It was Adams, of course.”

⁶⁸“Yes, it was Adams.”

⁶⁹“I was sure of it from the first.” ⁷⁰The two sat down together in the bow-window of the club. ⁷¹“To any one who wishes to study mankind this is the spot,” said Mycroft. ⁷²“Look at the magnificent types! ⁷³Look at these two men who are coming towards us, for example.”

⁷⁴“The billiard-marker and the other?”

⁷⁵“Precisely. ⁷⁶What do you make of the other?”

⁷⁷The two men had stopped opposite the window. ⁷⁸Some chalk marks over the waistcoat pocket were the only signs of billiards which I could see in one of them. ⁷⁹The other was a very small, dark fellow, with his hat pushed back and several packages under his arm.

⁸⁰“An old soldier, I perceive,” said Sherlock.

⁸¹“And very recently discharged,” remarked the brother.

⁸²“Served in India, I see.”

⁸³“And a non-commissioned officer.”

⁸⁴“Royal Artillery, I fancy,” said Sherlock.

⁸⁵“And a widower.”

⁸⁶“But with a child.”

⁸⁷“Children, my dear boy, children.”

⁸⁸“Come,” said I, laughing, “this is a little too much.”

⁸⁹“Surely,” answered Holmes, “it is not hard to say that a man with that bearing, expression of authority, and sunbaked skin, is a soldier, is more than a private, and is not long from India.”

⁹⁰“That he has not left the service long is shown by his still wearing his ‘ammunition boots’, as they are called,” observed Mycroft.

⁹¹“He had not the cavalry stride, yet he wore his hat on one side, as is shown by the lighter skin of that side of his brow. ⁹²His weight is against his being a sapper. ⁹³He is in the artillery.”

⁹⁴“Then, of course, his complete mourning shows that he has lost some one very dear. ⁹⁵The fact that he is doing his own shopping looks as though it were his wife. ⁹⁶He has been buying things for children, you perceive. ⁹⁷There is a rattle, which shows that one of them is very young. ⁹⁸The wife probably died in childbed. ⁹⁹The fact that he has a picture-book under his arm shows that there is another child to be thought of.”

¹⁰⁰I began to understand what my friend meant when he said that his brother possessed even keener faculties than he did himself. ¹⁰¹He glanced across at me and smiled. ¹⁰²Mycroft took snuff from a tortoise-shell box, and brushed away the wandering grains from his coat front with a large, red silk handkerchief.

¹⁰³“By the way, Sherlock,” said he, “I have had something quite after your own heart—a most singular problem—submitted to my judgment. ¹⁰⁴I really had not the energy to follow it up save in a very

incomplete fashion, but it gave me a basis for some pleasing speculation. ¹⁰⁵If you would care to hear the facts—”

¹⁰⁶“My dear Mycroft, I should be delighted.”

¹⁰⁷The brother scribbled a note upon a leaf of his pocket-book, and, ringing the bell, he handed it to the waiter.

¹⁰⁸“I have asked Mr. Melas to step across,” said he. ¹⁰⁹“He lodges on the floor above me, and I have some slight acquaintance with him, which led him to come to me in his perplexity. ¹¹⁰Mr. Melas is a Greek by extraction, as I understand, and he is a remarkable linguist. ¹¹¹He earns his living partly as interpreter in the law courts and partly by acting as guide to any wealthy Orientals who may visit the Northumberland Avenue hotels. ¹¹²I think I will leave him to tell his very remarkable experience in his own fashion.”

¹¹³A few minutes later we were joined by a short, stout man whose olive face and coal-black hair proclaimed his Southern origin, though his speech was that of an educated Englishman. ¹¹⁴He shook hands eagerly with Sherlock Holmes, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure when he understood that the specialist was anxious to hear his story.

¹¹⁵“I do not believe that the police credit me—on my word, I do not,” said he in a wailing voice. ¹¹⁶“Just because they have never heard of it before, they think that such a thing cannot be. ¹¹⁷But I know that I shall never be easy in my mind until I know what has become of my poor man with the sticking-plaster upon his face.”

¹¹⁸“I am all attention,” said Sherlock Holmes.

¹¹⁹“This is Wednesday evening,” said Mr. Melas. ¹²⁰“Well then, it was Monday night—only two days ago, you understand—that all this happened. ¹²¹I am an interpreter, as perhaps my neighbor there has told you. ¹²²I interpret all languages—or nearly all—but as I am a Greek by birth and with a Grecian name, it is with that particular tongue that I am principally associated. ¹²³For many years I have been the chief Greek interpreter in London, and my name is very well known in the hotels.

¹²⁴It happens not unfrequently that I am sent for at strange hours by foreigners who get into difficulties, or by travelers who arrive late and wish my services. ¹²⁵I was not surprised, therefore, on Monday night when a Mr. Latimer, a very fashionably dressed young man, came up to my rooms and asked me to accompany him in a cab which was waiting at the door. ¹²⁶A Greek friend had come to see him upon business, he said, and as he could speak nothing but his own tongue, the services of an interpreter were indispensable. ¹²⁷He gave me to understand that his house was some little distance off, in Kensington, and he seemed to be in a great hurry, bustling me rapidly into the cab when we had descended to the street.

¹²⁸“I say into the cab, but I soon became doubtful as to whether it was not a carriage in which I found myself. ¹²⁹It was certainly more roomy than the ordinary four-wheeled disgrace to London, and the fittings, though frayed, were of rich quality. ¹³⁰Mr. Latimer seated himself opposite to me and we started off through Charing Cross and up the Shaftesbury Avenue. ¹³¹We had come out upon Oxford Street and I had ventured some remark as to this being a roundabout way to Kensington, when my words were arrested by the extraordinary conduct of my companion.

¹³²“He began by drawing a most formidable-looking bludgeon loaded with lead from his pocket, and switching it backward and forward several times, as if to test its weight and strength. ¹³³Then he placed it without a word upon the seat beside him. ¹³⁴Having done this, he drew up the windows on each side, and I found to my astonishment that they were covered with paper so as to prevent my seeing through them.

¹³⁶“I am sorry to cut off your view, Mr. Melas,” said he. ¹³⁷“The fact is that I have no intention that you should see what the place is to which we are driving. ¹³⁸It might possibly be inconvenient to me if you could find your way there again.”

¹³⁹“As you can imagine, I was utterly taken aback by such an address. ¹⁴⁰My companion was a powerful, broad-shouldered young fellow, and, apart from the weapon, I should not have had the slightest chance in a struggle with him.

¹⁴¹“This is very extraordinary conduct, Mr. Latimer,” I stammered. ¹⁴²“You must be aware that what you are doing is quite illegal.”

¹⁴³“It is somewhat of a liberty, no doubt,” said he, “but we’ll make it up to you. ¹⁴⁴I must warn you, however, Mr. Melas, that if at any time to-night you attempt to raise an alarm or do anything which is against my interests, you will find it a very serious thing. ¹⁴⁵I beg you to remember that no one knows where you are, and that, whether you are in this carriage or in my house, you are equally in my power.”

¹⁴⁶“His words were quiet, but he had a rasping way of saying them which was very menacing. ¹⁴⁷I sat in silence wondering what on earth could be his reason for kidnapping me in this extraordinary fashion. ¹⁴⁸Whatever it might be, it was perfectly clear that there was no possible use in my resisting, and that I could only wait to see what might befall.

¹⁴⁹“For nearly two hours we drove without my having the least clue as to where we were going. ¹⁵⁰Sometimes the rattle of the stones told of a paved causeway, and at others our smooth, silent course suggested asphalt; but, save by this variation in sound, there was nothing at all which could in the remotest way help me to form a guess as to where we were. ¹⁵¹The paper over each window was impenetrable to light, and a blue curtain was drawn across the glass work in front. ¹⁵²It was a quarter-past seven when we left Pall Mall, and my watch showed me that it was ten minutes to nine when we at last came to a standstill. ¹⁵³My companion let down the window, and I caught a glimpse of a low, arched doorway with a lamp burning above it. ¹⁵⁴As I was hurried from the carriage it swung open, and I found myself inside the house, with a vague impression of a lawn and trees on each side of me as I entered. ¹⁵⁵Whether these were private grounds, however, or bona-fide country was more than I could possibly venture to say.

¹⁵⁶“There was a colored gas-lamp inside which was turned so low that I could see little save that the hall was of some size and hung with pictures. ¹⁵⁷In the dim light I could make out that the person who had opened the door was a small, mean-looking, middle-aged man with rounded shoulders. ¹⁵⁸As he turned towards us the glint of the light showed me that he was wearing glasses.

¹⁵⁹“Is this Mr. Melas, Harold?” said he.

¹⁶⁰“Yes.”

¹⁶¹“Well done, well done! ¹⁶²No ill-will, Mr. Melas, I hope, but we could not get on without you. ¹⁶³If you deal fair with us you’ll not regret it, but if you try any tricks, God help you!” ¹⁶⁴He spoke in a nervous, jerky fashion, and with little giggling laughs in between, but somehow he impressed me with fear more than the other.

¹⁶⁵“What do you want with me?” I asked.

¹⁶⁶“Only to ask a few questions of a Greek gentleman who is visiting us, and to let us have the answers. ¹⁶⁷But say no more than you are told to say, or—” here came the nervous giggle again—“you had better never have been born.”

¹⁶⁸“As he spoke he opened a door and showed the way into a room which appeared to be very richly furnished, but again the only light was afforded by a single lamp half-turned down. ¹⁶⁹The chamber was certainly large, and the way in which my feet sank into the carpet as I stepped across it told me of its

richness. ¹⁷⁰I caught glimpses of velvet chairs, a high white marble mantel-piece, and what seemed to be a suit of Japanese armor at one side of it. ¹⁷¹There was a chair just under the lamp, and the elderly man motioned that I should sit in it. ¹⁷²The younger had left us, but he suddenly returned through another door, leading with him a gentleman clad in some sort of loose dressing-gown who moved slowly towards us. ¹⁷³As he came into the circle of dim light which enabled me to see him more clearly I was thrilled with horror at his appearance. ¹⁷⁴He was deadly pale and terribly emaciated, with the protruding, brilliant eyes of a man whose spirit was greater than his strength. ¹⁷⁵But what shocked me more than any signs of physical weakness was that his face was grotesquely criss-crossed with sticking-plaster, and that one large pad of it was fastened over his mouth.

¹⁷⁶“Have you the slate, Harold?” cried the older man, as this strange being fell rather than sat down into a chair. ¹⁷⁷“Are his hands loose?” ¹⁷⁸Now, then, give him the pencil. ¹⁷⁹You are to ask the questions, Mr. Melas, and he will write the answers. ¹⁸⁰Ask him first of all whether he is prepared to sign the papers?”

¹⁸¹“The man's eyes flashed fire.

¹⁸²“Never!” he wrote in Greek upon the slate.

¹⁸³“On no condition?” I asked, at the bidding of our tyrant.

¹⁸⁴“Only if I see her married in my presence by a Greek priest whom I know.”

¹⁸⁵“The man giggled in his venomous way.

¹⁸⁶“You know what awaits you, then?”

¹⁸⁷“I care nothing for myself.”

¹⁸⁸“These are samples of the questions and answers which made up our strange half-spoken, half-written conversation. ¹⁸⁹Again and again I had to ask him whether he would give in and sign the documents. ¹⁹⁰Again and again I had the same indignant reply. ¹⁹¹But soon a happy thought came to me. ¹⁹²I took to adding on little sentences of my own to each question, innocent ones at first, to test whether either of our companions knew anything of the matter, and then, as I found that they showed no signs I played a more dangerous game. ¹⁹³Our conversation ran something like this:

¹⁹⁴“You can do no good by this obstinacy. ¹⁹⁵Who are you?”

¹⁹⁶“I care not. ¹⁹⁷I am a stranger in London.”

¹⁹⁸“Your fate will be upon your own head. ¹⁹⁹How long have you been here?”

²⁰⁰“Let it be so. ²⁰¹Three weeks.”

²⁰²“The property can never be yours. ²⁰³What ails you?”

²⁰⁴“It shall not go to villains. ²⁰⁵They are starving me.”

²⁰⁶“You shall go free if you sign. ²⁰⁷What house is this?”

²⁰⁸“I will never sign. ²⁰⁹I do not know.”

²¹⁰“You are not doing her any service. ²¹¹What is your name?”

²¹²“Let me hear her say so. ²¹³Kratides.”

²¹⁴“You shall see her if you sign. ²¹⁵Where are you from?”

²¹⁶“Then I shall never see her. ²¹⁷Athens.”

²¹⁸“Another five minutes, Mr. Holmes, and I should have wormed out the whole story under their very noses. ²¹⁹My very next question might have cleared the matter up, but at that instant the door opened and a woman stepped into the room. ²²⁰I could not see her clearly enough to know more than that she was tall and graceful, with black hair, and clad in some sort of loose white gown.

²²¹“‘Harold,’ said she, speaking English with a broken accent. ²²²‘I could not stay away longer. ²²³It is so lonely up there with only— ²²⁴Oh, my God, it is Paul!’

²²⁵“These last words were in Greek, and at the same instant the man with a convulsive effort tore the plaster from his lips, and screaming out ‘Sophy! Sophy!’ rushed into the woman's arms. ²²⁶Their embrace was but for an instant, however, for the younger man seized the woman and pushed her out of the room, while the elder easily overpowered his emaciated victim, and dragged him away through the other door. ²²⁷For a moment I was left alone in the room, and I sprang to my feet with some vague idea that I might in some way get a clue to what this house was in which I found myself. ²²⁸Fortunately, however, I took no steps, for looking up I saw that the older man was standing in the door-way with his eyes fixed upon me.

²²⁹“‘That will do, Mr. Melas,’ said he. ²³⁰‘You perceive that we have taken you into our confidence over some very private business. ²³¹We should not have troubled you, only that our friend who speaks Greek and who began these negotiations has been forced to return to the East. ²³²It was quite necessary for us to find some one to take his place, and we were fortunate in hearing of your powers.’

²³³“I bowed.

²³⁴“‘There are five sovereigns here,’ said he, walking up to me, ‘which will, I hope, be a sufficient fee. ²³⁵But remember,’ he added, tapping me lightly on the chest and giggling, ‘if you speak to a human soul about this—one human soul, mind—well, may God have mercy upon your soul!’

²³⁶“I cannot tell you the loathing and horror with which this insignificant-looking man inspired me. ²³⁷I could see him better now as the lamp-light shone upon him. ²³⁸His features were peaky and sallow, and his little pointed beard was thready and ill-nourished. ²³⁹He pushed his face forward as he spoke and his lips and eyelids were continually twitching like a man with St. Vitus's dance. ²⁴⁰I could not help thinking that his strange, catchy little laugh was also a symptom of some nervous malady. ²⁴¹The terror of his face lay in his eyes, however, steel gray, and glistening coldly with a malignant, inexorable cruelty in their depths.

²⁴²“‘We shall know if you speak of this,’ said he. ²⁴³‘We have our own means of information. ²⁴⁴Now you will find the carriage waiting, and my friend will see you on your way.’

²⁴⁵“I was hurried through the hall and into the vehicle, again obtaining that momentary glimpse of trees and a garden. ²⁴⁶Mr. Latimer followed closely at my heels, and took his place opposite to me without a word. ²⁴⁷In silence we again drove for an interminable distance with the windows raised, until at last, just after midnight, the carriage pulled up.

²⁴⁸“‘You will get down here, Mr. Melas,’ said my companion. ²⁴⁹‘I am sorry to leave you so far from your house, but there is no alternative. ²⁵⁰Any attempt upon your part to follow the carriage can only end in injury to yourself.’

²⁵¹“He opened the door as he spoke, and I had hardly time to spring out when the coachman lashed the horse and the carriage rattled away. ²⁵²I looked around me in astonishment. ²⁵³I was on some sort of a heathy common mottled over with dark clumps of furze-bushes. ²⁵⁴Far away stretched a line of houses, with a light here and there in the upper windows. ²⁵⁵On the other side I saw the red signal-lamps of a railway.

²⁵⁶“The carriage which had brought me was already out of sight. ²⁵⁷I stood gazing round and wondering where on earth I might be, when I saw some one coming towards me in the darkness. ²⁵⁸As he came up to me I made out that he was a railway porter.

²⁵⁹“Can you tell me what place this is?” I asked.

²⁶⁰“Wandsworth Common,” said he.

²⁶¹“Can I get a train into town?”

²⁶²“If you walk on a mile or so to Clapham Junction,” said he, “you’ll just be in time for the last to Victoria.”

²⁶³“So that was the end of my adventure, Mr. Holmes. ²⁶⁴I do not know where I was, nor whom I spoke with, nor anything save what I have told you. ²⁶⁵But I know that there is foul play going on, and I want to help that unhappy man if I can. ²⁶⁶I told the whole story to Mr. Mycroft Holmes next morning, and subsequently to the police.”

²⁶⁷We all sat in silence for some little time after listening to this extraordinary narrative. ²⁶⁸Then Sherlock looked across at his brother.

²⁶⁹“Any steps?” he asked.

²⁷⁰Mycroft picked up the Daily News, which was lying on the side-table.

²⁷¹“Anybody supplying any information as to the whereabouts of a Greek gentleman named Paul Kratides, from Athens, who is unable to speak English, will be rewarded. ²⁷²A similar reward paid to any one giving information about a Greek lady whose first name is Sophy. ²⁷³X 2473.

²⁷⁴“That was in all the dailies. ²⁷⁵No answer.”

²⁷⁶“How about the Greek Legation?”

²⁷⁷“I have inquired. ²⁷⁸They know nothing.”

²⁷⁹“A wire to the head of the Athens police, then?”

²⁸⁰“Sherlock has all the energy of the family,” said Mycroft, turning to me. ²⁸¹“Well, you take the case up by all means, and let me know if you do any good.”

²⁸²“Certainly,” answered my friend, rising from his chair. ²⁸³“I’ll let you know, and Mr. Melas also. ²⁸⁴In the meantime, Mr. Melas, I should certainly be on my guard, if I were you, for of course they must know through these advertisements that you have betrayed them.”

²⁸⁵As we walked home together, Holmes stopped at a telegraph office and sent off several wires.

²⁸⁶“You see, Watson,” he remarked, “our evening has been by no means wasted. ²⁸⁷Some of my most interesting cases have come to me in this way through Mycroft. ²⁸⁸The problem which we have just listened to, although it can admit of but one explanation, has still some distinguishing features.”

²⁸⁹“You have hopes of solving it?”

²⁹⁰“Well, knowing as much as we do, it will be singular indeed if we fail to discover the rest. ²⁹¹You must yourself have formed some theory which will explain the facts to which we have listened.”

²⁹²“In a vague way, yes.”

²⁹³“What was your idea, then?”

²⁹⁴“It seemed to me to be obvious that this Greek girl had been carried off by the young Englishman named Harold Latimer.”

²⁹⁵“Carried off from where?”

²⁹⁶“Athens, perhaps.”

²⁹⁷Sherlock Holmes shook his head. ²⁹⁸“This young man could not talk a word of Greek. ²⁹⁹The lady could talk English fairly well. ³⁰⁰Inference—that she had been in England some little time, but he had not been in Greece.”

³⁰¹“Well, then, we will presume that she had come on a visit to England, and that this Harold had persuaded her to fly with him.”

³⁰²“That is more probable.”

³⁰³“Then the brother—for that, I fancy, must be the relationship—comes over from Greece to interfere. ³⁰⁴He imprudently puts himself into the power of the young man and his older associate. ³⁰⁵They seize him and use violence towards him in order to make him sign some papers to make over the girl's fortune—of which he may be trustee—to them. ³⁰⁶This he refuses to do. ³⁰⁷In order to negotiate with him they have to get an interpreter, and they pitch upon this Mr. Melas, having used some other one before. ³⁰⁸The girl is not told of the arrival of her brother, and finds it out by the merest accident.”

³⁰⁹“Excellent, Watson!” cried Holmes. ³¹⁰“I really fancy that you are not far from the truth. ³¹¹You see that we hold all the cards, and we have only to fear some sudden act of violence on their part. ³¹²If they give us time we must have them.”

³¹³“But how can we find where this house lies?”

³¹⁴“Well, if our conjecture is correct and the girl's name is or was Sophy Kratides, we should have no difficulty in tracing her. ³¹⁵That must be our main hope, for the brother is, of course, a complete stranger. ³¹⁶It is clear that some time has elapsed since this Harold established these relations with the girl—some weeks, at any rate—since the brother in Greece has had time to hear of it and come across. ³¹⁷If they have been living in the same place during this time, it is probable that we shall have some answer to Mycroft's advertisement.”

³¹⁸We had reached our house in Baker Street while we had been talking. ³¹⁹Holmes ascended the stair first, and as he opened the door of our room he gave a start of surprise. ³²⁰Looking over his shoulder, I was equally astonished. ³²¹His brother Mycroft was sitting smoking in the arm-chair.

³²²“Come in, Sherlock! ³²³Come in, sir,” said he blandly, smiling at our surprised faces. ³²⁴“You don't expect such energy from me, do you, Sherlock? ³²⁵But somehow this case attracts me.”

³²⁶“How did you get here?”

³²⁷“I passed you in a hansom.”

³²⁸“There has been some new development?”

³²⁹“I had an answer to my advertisement.”

³³⁰“Ah!”

³³¹“Yes, it came within a few minutes of your leaving.”

³³²“And to what effect?”

³³³Mycroft Holmes took out a sheet of paper.

³³⁴“Here it is,” said he, “written with a J pen on royal cream paper by a middle-aged man with a weak constitution.

³³⁵“Sir [he says]:

³³⁶“In answer to your advertisement of to-day's date, I beg to inform you that I know the young lady in question very well. ³³⁷If you should care to call upon me I could give you some particulars as to her painful history. ³³⁸She is living at present at The Myrtles, Beckenham.

³³⁹“Yours faithfully,

³⁴⁰“J. Davenport.

³⁴¹“He writes from Lower Brixton,” said Mycroft Holmes. ³⁴²“Do you not think that we might drive to him now, Sherlock, and learn these particulars?”

³⁴³“My dear Mycroft, the brother's life is more valuable than the sister's story. ³⁴⁴I think we should call at Scotland Yard for Inspector Gregson, and go straight out to Beckenham. ³⁴⁵We know that a man is being done to death, and every hour may be vital.”

³⁴⁶“Better pick up Mr. Melas on our way,” I suggested. ³⁴⁷“We may need an interpreter.”

³⁴⁸“Excellent,” said Sherlock Holmes. ³⁴⁹“Send the boy for a four-wheeler, and we shall be off at once.”

³⁵⁰He opened the table-drawer as he spoke, and I noticed that he slipped his revolver into his pocket.

³⁵¹“Yes,” said he, in answer to my glance; “I should say from what we have heard, that we are dealing with a particularly dangerous gang.”

³⁵²It was almost dark before we found ourselves in Pall Mall, at the rooms of Mr. Melas. ³⁵³A gentleman had just called for him, and he was gone.

³⁵⁴“Can you tell me where?” asked Mycroft Holmes.

³⁵⁵“I don't know, sir,” answered the woman who had opened the door; “I only know that he drove away with the gentleman in a carriage.”

³⁵⁶“Did the gentleman give a name?”

³⁵⁷“No, sir.”

³⁵⁸“He wasn't a tall, handsome, dark young man?”

³⁵⁹“Oh, no, sir. ³⁶⁰He was a little gentleman, with glasses, thin in the face, but very pleasant in his ways, for he was laughing all the time that he was talking.”

³⁶¹“Come along!” cried Sherlock Holmes, abruptly. ³⁶²“This grows serious,” he observed, as we drove to Scotland Yard. ³⁶³“These men have got hold of Melas again. ³⁶⁴He is a man of no physical courage, as they are well aware from their experience the other night. ³⁶⁵This villain was able to terrorize him the instant that he got into his presence. ³⁶⁶No doubt they want his professional services, but, having used him, they may be inclined to punish him for what they will regard as his treachery.”

³⁶⁷Our hope was that, by taking train, we might get to Beckenham as soon or sooner than the carriage.

³⁶⁸On reaching Scotland Yard, however, it was more than an hour before we could get Inspector Gregson and comply with the legal formalities which would enable us to enter the house. ³⁶⁹It was a quarter to ten before we reached London Bridge, and half past before the four of us alighted on the Beckenham platform. ³⁷⁰A drive of half a mile brought us to The Myrtles—a large, dark house standing back from the road in its own grounds. ³⁷¹Here we dismissed our cab, and made our way up the drive together.

³⁷²“The windows are all dark,” remarked the inspector. ³⁷³“The house seems deserted.”

³⁷⁴“Our birds are flown and the nest empty,” said Holmes.

³⁷⁵“Why do you say so?”

³⁷⁶“A carriage heavily loaded with luggage has passed out during the last hour.”

³⁷⁷The inspector laughed. ³⁷⁸“I saw the wheel-tracks in the light of the gate-lamp, but where does the luggage come in?”

³⁷⁹“You may have observed the same wheel-tracks going the other way. ³⁸⁰But the outward-bound ones were very much deeper—so much so that we can say for a certainty that there was a very considerable weight on the carriage.”

³⁸¹“You get a trifle beyond me there,” said the inspector, shrugging his shoulder. ³⁸²“It will not be an easy door to force, but we will try if we cannot make some one hear us.”

³⁸³He hammered loudly at the knocker and pulled at the bell, but without any success. ³⁸⁴Holmes had slipped away, but he came back in a few minutes.

³⁸⁵“I have a window open,” said he.

³⁸⁶“It is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes,” remarked the inspector, as he noted the clever way in which my friend had forced back the catch. ³⁸⁷“Well, I think that under the circumstances we may enter without an invitation.”

³⁸⁸One after the other we made our way into a large apartment, which was evidently that in which Mr. Melas had found himself. ³⁸⁹The inspector had lit his lantern, and by its light we could see the two doors, the curtain, the lamp, and the suit of Japanese mail as he had described them. ³⁹⁰On the table lay two glasses, and empty brandy-bottle, and the remains of a meal.

³⁹¹“What is that?” asked Holmes, suddenly.

³⁹²We all stood still and listened. ³⁹³A low moaning sound was coming from somewhere over our heads.

³⁹⁴Holmes rushed to the door and out into the hall. ³⁹⁵The dismal noise came from upstairs. ³⁹⁶He dashed up, the inspector and I at his heels, while his brother Mycroft followed as quickly as his great bulk would permit.

³⁹⁷Three doors faced up upon the second floor, and it was from the central of these that the sinister sounds were issuing, sinking sometimes into a dull mumble and rising again into a shrill whine. ³⁹⁸It was locked, but the key had been left on the outside. ³⁹⁹Holmes flung open the door and rushed in, but he was out again in an instant, with his hand to his throat.

⁴⁰⁰“It's charcoal,” he cried. ⁴⁰¹“Give it time. ⁴⁰²It will clear.”

⁴⁰³Peering in, we could see that the only light in the room came from a dull blue flame which flickered from a small brass tripod in the centre. ⁴⁰⁴It threw a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the shadows beyond we saw the vague loom of two figures which crouched against the wall. ⁴⁰⁵From the open door there reeked a horrible poisonous exhalation which set us gasping and coughing. ⁴⁰⁶Holmes rushed to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he threw up the window and hurled the brazen tripod out into the garden.

⁴⁰⁷“We can enter in a minute,” he gasped, darting out again. ⁴⁰⁸“Where is a candle? ⁴⁰⁹I doubt if we could strike a match in that atmosphere. ⁴¹⁰Hold the light at the door and we shall get them out, Mycroft. ⁴¹¹Now!”

⁴¹²With a rush we got to the poisoned men and dragged them out into the well-lit hall. ⁴¹³Both of them were blue-lipped and insensible, with swollen, congested faces and protruding eyes. ⁴¹⁴Indeed, so

distorted were their features that, save for his black beard and stout figure, we might have failed to recognize in one of them the Greek interpreter who had parted from us only a few hours before at the Diogenes Club. ⁴¹⁵His hands and feet were securely strapped together, and he bore over one eye the marks of a violent blow. ⁴¹⁶The other, who was secured in a similar fashion, was a tall man in the last stage of emaciation, with several strips of sticking-plaster arranged in a grotesque pattern over his face. ⁴¹⁷He had ceased to moan as we laid him down, and a glance showed me that for him at least our aid had come too late. ⁴¹⁸Mr. Melas, however, still lived, and in less than an hour, with the aid of ammonia and brandy I had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes, and of knowing that my hand had drawn him back from that dark valley in which all paths meet.

⁴¹⁹It was a simple story which he had to tell, and one which did but confirm our own deductions. ⁴²⁰His visitor, on entering his rooms, had drawn a life-preserver from his sleeve, and had so impressed him with the fear of instant and inevitable death that he had kidnapped him for the second time. ⁴²¹Indeed, it was almost mesmeric, the effect which this giggling ruffian had produced upon the unfortunate linguist, for he could not speak of him save with trembling hands and a blanched cheek. ⁴²²He had been taken swiftly to Beckenham, and had acted as interpreter in a second interview, even more dramatic than the first, in which the two Englishmen had menaced their prisoner with instant death if he did not comply with their demands. ⁴²³Finally, finding him proof against every threat, they had hurled him back into his prison, and after reproaching Melas with his treachery, which appeared from the newspaper advertisement, they had stunned him with a blow from a stick, and he remembered nothing more until he found us bending over him.

⁴²⁴And this was the singular case of the Grecian Interpreter, the explanation of which is still involved in some mystery. ⁴²⁵We were able to find out, by communicating with the gentleman who had answered the advertisement, that the unfortunate young lady came of a wealthy Grecian family, and that she had been on a visit to some friends in England. ⁴²⁶While there she had met a young man named Harold Latimer, who had acquired an ascendancy over her and had eventually persuaded her to fly with him. ⁴²⁷Her friends, shocked at the event, had contented themselves with informing her brother at Athens, and had then washed their hands of the matter. ⁴²⁸The brother, on his arrival in England, had imprudently placed himself in the power of Latimer and of his associate, whose name was Wilson Kemp—a man of the foulest antecedents. ⁴²⁹These two, finding that through his ignorance of the language he was helpless in their hands, had kept him a prisoner, and had endeavored by cruelty and starvation to make him sign away his own and his sister's property. ⁴³⁰They had kept him in the house without the girl's knowledge, and the plaster over the face had been for the purpose of making recognition difficult in case she should ever catch a glimpse of him. ⁴³¹Her feminine perception, however, had instantly seen through the disguise when, on the occasion of the interpreter's visit, she had seen him for the first time. ⁴³²The poor girl, however, was herself a prisoner, for there was no one about the house except the man who acted as coachman, and his wife, both of whom were tools of the conspirators. ⁴³³Finding that their secret was out, and that their prisoner was not to be coerced, the two villains with the girl had fled away at a few hours' notice from the furnished house which they had hired, having first, as they thought, taken vengeance both upon the man who had defied and the one who had betrayed them.

⁴³⁴Months afterwards a curious newspaper cutting reached us from Buda-Pesth. ⁴³⁵It told how two Englishmen who had been traveling with a woman had met with a tragic end. ⁴³⁶They had each been stabbed, it seems, and the Hungarian police were of opinion that they had quarreled and had inflicted mortal injuries upon each other. ⁴³⁷Holmes, however, is, I fancy, of a different way of thinking, and holds to this day that, if one could find the Grecian girl, one might learn how the wrongs of herself and her brother came to be avenged.

The Naval Treaty

¹The July which immediately succeeded my marriage was made memorable by three cases of interest, in which I had the privilege of being associated with Sherlock Holmes and of studying his methods. ²I find them recorded in my notes under the headings of “The Adventure of the Second Stain,” “The Adventure of the Naval Treaty,” and “The Adventure of the Tired Captain.” ³The first of these, however, deals with interest of such importance and implicates so many of the first families in the kingdom that for many years it will be impossible to make it public. ⁴No case, however, in which Holmes was engaged has ever illustrated the value of his analytical methods so clearly or has impressed those who were associated with him so deeply. ⁵I still retain an almost verbatim report of the interview in which he demonstrated the true facts of the case to Monsieur Dubugue of the Paris police, and Fritz von Waldbaum, the well-known specialist of Dantzic, both of whom had wasted their energies upon what proved to be side-issues. ⁶The new century will have come, however, before the story can be safely told. ⁷Meanwhile I pass on to the second on my list, which promised also at one time to be of national importance, and was marked by several incidents which give it a quite unique character.

⁸During my school-days I had been intimately associated with a lad named Percy Phelps, who was of much the same age as myself, though he was two classes ahead of me. ⁹He was a very brilliant boy, and carried away every prize which the school had to offer, finishing his exploits by winning a scholarship which sent him on to continue his triumphant career at Cambridge. ¹⁰He was, I remember, extremely well connected, and even when we were all little boys together we knew that his mother's brother was Lord Holdhurst, the great conservative politician. ¹¹This gaudy relationship did him little good at school. ¹²On the contrary, it seemed rather a piquant thing to us to chevy him about the playground and hit him over the shins with a wicket. ¹³But it was another thing when he came out into the world. ¹⁴I heard vaguely that his abilities and the influences which he commanded had won him a good position at the Foreign Office, and then he passed completely out of my mind until the following letter recalled his existence:

¹⁵Briarbrae, Woking.

¹⁶My dear Watson:

¹⁷I have no doubt that you can remember “Tadpole” Phelps, who was in the fifth form when you were in the third. ¹⁸It is possible even that you may have heard that through my uncle's influence I obtained a good appointment at the Foreign Office, and that I was in a situation of trust and honor until a horrible misfortune came suddenly to blast my career.

¹⁹There is no use writing of the details of that dreadful event. ²⁰In the event of your acceding to my request it is probable that I shall have to narrate them to you. ²¹I have only just recovered from nine weeks of brain-fever, and am still exceedingly weak. ²²Do you think that you could bring your friend Mr. Holmes down to see me? ²³I should like to have his opinion of the case, though the authorities assure me that nothing more can be done. ²⁴Do try to bring him down, and as soon as possible. ²⁵Every minute seems an hour while I live in this state of horrible suspense. ²⁶Assure him that if I have not asked his advice sooner it was not because I did not appreciate his talents, but because I have been off my head ever since the blow fell. ²⁷Now I am clear again, though I dare not think of it too much for fear of a relapse. ²⁸I am still so weak that I have to write, as you see, by dictating. ²⁹Do try to bring him.

³⁰Your old school-fellow,

³¹Percy Phelps.

³²There was something that touched me as I read this letter, something pitiable in the reiterated appeals to bring Holmes. ³³So moved was I that even had it been a difficult matter I should have tried it, but of course I knew well that Holmes loved his art, so that he was ever as ready to bring his aid as his client could be to receive it. ³⁴My wife agreed with me that not a moment should be lost in laying the matter before him, and so within an hour of breakfast-time I found myself back once more in the old rooms in Baker Street.

³⁵Holmes was seated at his side-table clad in his dressing-gown, and working hard over a chemical investigation. ³⁶A large curved retort was boiling furiously in the bluish flame of a Bunsen burner, and the distilled drops were condensing into a two-litre measure. ³⁷My friend hardly glanced up as I entered, and I, seeing that his investigation must be of importance, seated myself in an arm-chair and waited. ³⁸He dipped into this bottle or that, drawing out a few drops of each with his glass pipette, and finally brought a test-tube containing a solution over to the table. ³⁹In his right hand he held a slip of litmus-paper.

⁴⁰"You come at a crisis, Watson," said he. ⁴¹"If this paper remains blue, all is well. ⁴²If it turns red, it means a man's life." ⁴³He dipped it into the test-tube and it flushed at once into a dull, dirty crimson. ⁴⁴"Hum! ⁴⁵I thought as much!" he cried. ⁴⁶"I will be at your service in an instant, Watson. ⁴⁷You will find tobacco in the Persian slipper." ⁴⁸He turned to his desk and scribbled off several telegrams, which were handed over to the page-boy. ⁴⁹Then he threw himself down into the chair opposite, and drew up his knees until his fingers clasped round his long, thin shins.

⁵⁰"A very commonplace little murder," said he. ⁵¹"You've got something better, I fancy. ⁵²You are the stormy petrel of crime, Watson. ⁵³What is it?"

⁵⁴I handed him the letter, which he read with the most concentrated attention.

⁵⁵"It does not tell us very much, does it?" he remarked, as he handed it back to me.

⁵⁶"Hardly anything."

⁵⁷"And yet the writing is of interest."

⁵⁸"But the writing is not his own."

⁵⁹"Precisely. ⁶⁰It is a woman's."

⁶¹"A man's surely," I cried.

⁶²"No, a woman's, and a woman of rare character. ⁶³You see, at the commencement of an investigation it is something to know that your client is in close contact with some one who, for good or evil, has an exceptional nature. ⁶⁴My interest is already awakened in the case. ⁶⁵If you are ready we will start at once for Woking, and see this diplomatist who is in such evil case, and the lady to whom he dictates his letters."

⁶⁶We were fortunate enough to catch an early train at Waterloo, and in a little under an hour we found ourselves among the fir-woods and the heather of Woking. ⁶⁷Briarbrae proved to be a large detached house standing in extensive grounds within a few minutes' walk of the station. ⁶⁸On sending in our cards we were shown into an elegantly appointed drawing-room, where we were joined in a few minutes by a rather stout man who received us with much hospitality. ⁶⁹His age may have been nearer forty than thirty, but his cheeks were so ruddy and his eyes so merry that he still conveyed the impression of a plump and mischievous boy.

⁷⁰"I am so glad that you have come," said he, shaking our hands with effusion. ⁷¹"Percy has been inquiring for you all morning. ⁷²Ah, poor old chap, he clings to any straw! ⁷³His father and his mother asked me to see you, for the mere mention of the subject is very painful to them."

⁷⁴“We have had no details yet,” observed Holmes. ⁷⁵“I perceive that you are not yourself a member of the family.”

⁷⁶Our acquaintance looked surprised, and then, glancing down, he began to laugh.

⁷⁷“Of course you saw the J H monogram on my locket,” said he. ⁷⁸“For a moment I thought you had done something clever. ⁷⁹Joseph Harrison is my name, and as Percy is to marry my sister Annie I shall at least be a relation by marriage. ⁸⁰You will find my sister in his room, for she has nursed him hand-and-foot this two months back. ⁸¹Perhaps we'd better go in at once, for I know how impatient he is.”

⁸²The chamber in which we were shown was on the same floor as the drawing-room. ⁸³It was furnished partly as a sitting and partly as a bedroom, with flowers arranged daintily in every nook and corner. ⁸⁴A young man, very pale and worn, was lying upon a sofa near the open window, through which came the rich scent of the garden and the balmy summer air. ⁸⁵A woman was sitting beside him, who rose as we entered.

⁸⁶“Shall I leave, Percy?” she asked.

⁸⁷He clutched her hand to detain her. ⁸⁸“How are you, Watson?” said he, cordially. ⁸⁹“I should never have known you under that moustache, and I dare say you would not be prepared to swear to me. ⁹⁰This I presume is your celebrated friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

⁹¹I introduced him in a few words, and we both sat down. ⁹²The stout young man had left us, but his sister still remained with her hand in that of the invalid. ⁹³She was a striking-looking woman, a little short and thick for symmetry, but with a beautiful olive complexion, large, dark, Italian eyes, and a wealth of deep black hair. ⁹⁴Her rich tints made the white face of her companion the more worn and haggard by the contrast.

⁹⁵“I won't waste your time,” said he, raising himself upon the sofa. ⁹⁶“I'll plunge into the matter without further preamble. ⁹⁷I was a happy and successful man, Mr. Holmes, and on the eve of being married, when a sudden and dreadful misfortune wrecked all my prospects in life.

⁹⁸“I was, as Watson may have told you, in the Foreign Office, and through the influences of my uncle, Lord Holdhurst, I rose rapidly to a responsible position. ⁹⁹When my uncle became foreign minister in this administration he gave me several missions of trust, and as I always brought them to a successful conclusion, he came at last to have the utmost confidence in my ability and tact.

¹⁰⁰“Nearly ten weeks ago—to be more accurate, on the twenty-third of May—he called me into his private room, and, after complimenting me on the good work which I had done, he informed me that he had a new commission of trust for me to execute.

¹⁰¹“‘This,’ said he, taking a gray roll of paper from his bureau, ‘is the original of that secret treaty between England and Italy of which, I regret to say, some rumors have already got into the public press.

¹⁰²It is of enormous importance that nothing further should leak out. The French or the Russian embassy would pay an immense sum to learn the contents of these papers. ¹⁰³They should not leave my bureau were it not that it is absolutely necessary to have them copied. ¹⁰⁴You have a desk in your office?’

¹⁰⁵“‘Yes, sir.’

¹⁰⁶“‘Then take the treaty and lock it up there. ¹⁰⁷I shall give directions that you may remain behind when the others go, so that you may copy it at your leisure without fear of being overlooked. ¹⁰⁸When you have finished, relock both the original and the draft in the desk, and hand them over to me personally to-morrow morning.’

¹⁰⁹“I took the papers and—”

¹¹⁰“Excuse me an instant,” said Holmes. ¹¹¹“Were you alone during this conversation?”

¹¹²“Absolutely.”

¹¹³“In a large room?”

¹¹⁴“Thirty feet each way.”

¹¹⁵“In the centre?”

¹¹⁶“Yes, about it.”

¹¹⁷“And speaking low?”

¹¹⁸“My uncle's voice is always remarkably low. ¹¹⁹I hardly spoke at all.”

¹²⁰“Thank you,” said Holmes, shutting his eyes; “pray go on.”

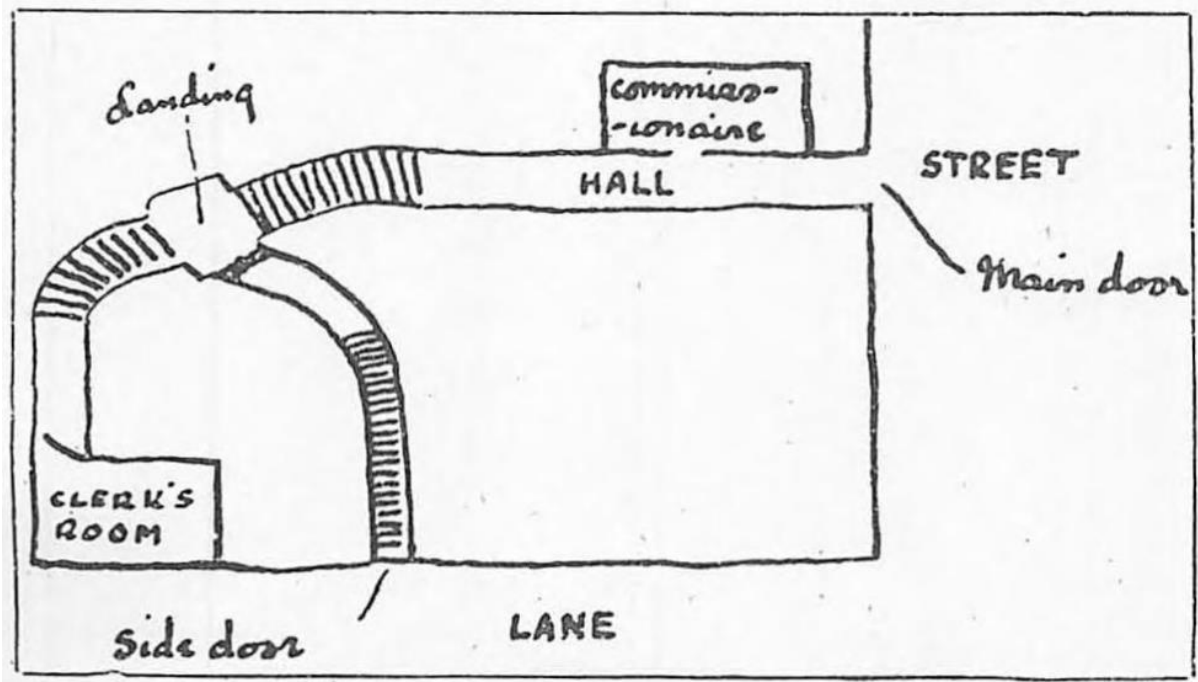
¹²¹“I did exactly what he indicated, and waited until the other clerks had departed. ¹²²One of them in my room, Charles Gorot, had some arrears of work to make up, so I left him there and went out to dine. ¹²³When I returned he was gone. ¹²⁴I was anxious to hurry my work, for I knew that Joseph—the Mr. Harrison whom you saw just now—was in town, and that he would travel down to Woking by the eleven-o'clock train, and I wanted if possible to catch it.

¹²⁵“When I came to examine the treaty I saw at once that it was of such importance that my uncle had been guilty of no exaggeration in what he had said. ¹²⁶Without going into details, I may say that it defined the position of Great Britain towards the Triple Alliance, and fore-shadowed the policy which this country would pursue in the event of the French fleet gaining a complete ascendancy over that of Italy in the Mediterranean. ¹²⁷The questions treated in it were purely naval. ¹²⁸At the end were the signatures of the high dignitaries who had signed it. ¹²⁹I glanced my eyes over it, and then settled down to my task of copying.

¹³⁰“It was a long document, written in the French language, and containing twenty-six separate articles. ¹³¹I copied as quickly as I could, but at nine o'clock I had only done nine articles, and it seemed hopeless for me to attempt to catch my train. ¹³²I was feeling drowsy and stupid, partly from my dinner and also from the effects of a long day's work. ¹³³A cup of coffee would clear my brain. ¹³⁴A commissionaire remains all night in a little lodge at the foot of the stairs, and is in the habit of making coffee at his spirit-lamp for any of the officials who may be working over time. ¹³⁵I rang the bell, therefore, to summon him.

¹³⁶“To my surprise, it was a woman who answered the summons, a large, coarse-faced, elderly woman, in an apron. ¹³⁷She explained that she was the commissionaire's wife, who did the charing, and I gave her the order for the coffee.

¹³⁸“I wrote two more articles and then, feeling more drowsy than ever, I rose and walked up and down the room to stretch my legs. ¹³⁹My coffee had not yet come, and I wondered what was the cause of the delay could be. ¹⁴⁰Opening the door, I started down the corridor to find out. ¹⁴¹There was a straight passage, dimly lighted, which led from the room in which I had been working, and was the only exit from it. ¹⁴²It ended in a curving staircase, with the commissionaire's lodge in the passage at the bottom. ¹⁴³Half way down this staircase is a small landing, with another passage running into it at right angles. ¹⁴⁴This second one leads by means of a second small stair to a side door, used by servants, and also as a short cut by clerks when coming from Charles Street. ¹⁴⁵Here is a rough chart of the place.”



¹⁴⁶“Thank you. ¹⁴⁷I think that I quite follow you,” said Sherlock Holmes.

¹⁴⁸“It is of the utmost importance that you should notice this point. ¹⁴⁹I went down the stairs and into the hall, where I found the commissionaire fast asleep in his box, with the kettle boiling furiously upon the spirit-lamp. ¹⁵⁰I took off the kettle and blew out the lamp, for the water was spurting over the floor. ¹⁵¹Then I put out my hand and was about to shake the man, who was still sleeping soundly, when a bell over his head rang loudly, and he woke with a start.

¹⁵²“‘Mr. Phelps, sir!’ said he, looking at me in bewilderment.

¹⁵³“‘I came down to see if my coffee was ready.’

¹⁵⁴“‘I was boiling the kettle when I fell asleep, sir.’ ¹⁵⁵He looked at me and then up at the still quivering bell with an ever-growing astonishment upon his face.

¹⁵⁶“‘If you was here, sir, then who rang the bell?’ he asked.

¹⁵⁷“‘The bell!’ I cried. ¹⁵⁸‘What bell is it?’

¹⁵⁹“‘It’s the bell of the room you were working in.’

¹⁶⁰“A cold hand seemed to close round my heart. ¹⁶¹Some one, then, was in that room where my precious treaty lay upon the table. ¹⁶²I ran frantically up the stair and along the passage. ¹⁶³There was no one in the corridors, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁶⁴There was no one in the room. ¹⁶⁵All was exactly as I left it, save only that the papers which had been committed to my care had been taken from the desk on which they lay. ¹⁶⁶The copy was there, and the original was gone.”

¹⁶⁷Holmes sat up in his chair and rubbed his hands. ¹⁶⁸I could see that the problem was entirely to his heart. ¹⁶⁹“Pray, what did you do then?” he murmured.

¹⁷⁰“I recognized in an instant that the thief must have come up the stairs from the side door. ¹⁷¹Of course I must have met him if he had come the other way.”

¹⁷²“You were satisfied that he could not have been concealed in the room all the time, or in the corridor which you have just described as dimly lighted?”

¹⁷³“It is absolutely impossible. ¹⁷⁴A rat could not conceal himself either in the room or the corridor. ¹⁷⁵There is no cover at all.”

¹⁷⁶“Thank you. ¹⁷⁷Pray proceed.”

¹⁷⁸“The commissioner, seeing by my pale face that something was to be feared, had followed me upstairs. ¹⁷⁹Now we both rushed along the corridor and down the steep steps which led to Charles Street. ¹⁸⁰The door at the bottom was closed, but unlocked. ¹⁸¹We flung it open and rushed out. ¹⁸²I can distinctly remember that as we did so there came three chimes from a neighboring clock. ¹⁸³It was quarter to ten.”

¹⁸⁴“That is of enormous importance,” said Holmes, making a note upon his shirt-cuff.

¹⁸⁵“The night was very dark, and a thin, warm rain was falling. ¹⁸⁶There was no one in Charles Street, but a great traffic was going on, as usual, in Whitehall, at the extremity. ¹⁸⁷We rushed along the pavement, bare-headed as we were, and at the far corner we found a policeman standing.

¹⁸⁸“‘A robbery has been committed,’ I gasped. ¹⁸⁹‘A document of immense value has been stolen from the Foreign Office. ¹⁹⁰Has any one passed this way?’

¹⁹¹“‘I have been standing here for a quarter of an hour, sir,’ said he; ‘only one person has passed during that time—a woman, tall and elderly, with a Paisley shawl.’

¹⁹²“‘Ah, that is only my wife,’ cried the commissioner; ‘has no one else passed?’

¹⁹³“‘No one.’

¹⁹⁴“‘Then it must be the other way that the thief took,’ cried the fellow, tugging at my sleeve.

¹⁹⁵“‘But I was not satisfied, and the attempts which he made to draw me away increased my suspicions.

¹⁹⁶“‘Which way did the woman go?’ I cried.

¹⁹⁷“‘I don’t know, sir. ¹⁹⁸I noticed her pass, but I had no special reason for watching her. ¹⁹⁹She seemed to be in a hurry.’

²⁰⁰“‘How long ago was it?’

²⁰¹“‘Oh, not very many minutes.’

²⁰²“‘Within the last five?’

²⁰³“‘Well, it could not be more than five.’

²⁰⁴“‘You’re only wasting your time, sir, and every minute now is of importance,’ cried the commissioner; ‘take my word for it that my old woman has nothing to do with it, and come down to the other end of the street. ²⁰⁵Well, if you won’t, I will.’ ²⁰⁶And with that he rushed off in the other direction.

²⁰⁷“‘But I was after him in an instant and caught him by the sleeve.

²⁰⁸“‘Where do you live?’ said I.

²⁰⁹“‘16 Ivy Lane, Brixton,’ he answered. ²¹⁰‘But don’t let yourself be drawn away upon a false scent, Mr. Phelps. ²¹¹Come to the other end of the street and let us see if we can hear of anything.’

²¹²“‘Nothing was to be lost by following his advice. ²¹³With the policeman we both hurried down, but only to find the street full of traffic, many people coming and going, but all only too eager to get to a place of safety upon so wet a night. ²¹⁴There was no lounge who could tell us who had passed.

²¹⁵“Then we returned to the office, and searched the stairs and the passage without result. ²¹⁶The corridor which led to the room was laid down with a kind of creamy linoleum which shows an impression very easily. ²¹⁷We examined it very carefully, but found no outline of any footmark.”

²¹⁸“Had it been raining all evening?”

²¹⁹“Since about seven.”

²²⁰“How is it, then, that the woman who came into the room about nine left no traces with her muddy boots?”

²²¹“I am glad you raised the point. ²²²It occurred to me at the time. ²²³The charwomen are in the habit of taking off their boots at the commissioner's office, and putting on list slippers.”

²²⁴“That is very clear. ²²⁵There were no marks, then, though the night was a wet one? ²²⁶The chain of events is certainly one of extraordinary interest. ²²⁷What did you do next?”

²²⁸“We examined the room also. ²²⁹There is no possibility of a secret door, and the windows are quite thirty feet from the ground. ²³⁰Both of them were fastened on the inside. ²³¹The carpet prevents any possibility of a trap-door, and the ceiling is of the ordinary whitewashed kind. ²³²I will pledge my life that whoever stole my papers could only have come through the door.”

²³³“How about the fireplace?”

²³⁴“They use none. ²³⁵There is a stove. ²³⁶The bell-rope hangs from the wire just to the right of my desk. ²³⁷Whoever rang it must have come right up to the desk to do it. ²³⁸But why should any criminal wish to ring the bell? ²³⁹It is a most insoluble mystery.”

²⁴⁰“Certainly the incident was unusual. ²⁴¹What were your next steps? ²⁴²You examined the room, I presume, to see if the intruder had left any traces—any cigar-end or dropped glove or hairpin or other trifle?”

²⁴³“There was nothing of the sort.”

²⁴⁴“No smell?”

²⁴⁵“Well, we never thought of that.”

²⁴⁶“Ah, a scent of tobacco would have been worth a great deal to us in such an investigation.”

²⁴⁷“I never smoke myself, so I think I should have observed it if there had been any smell of tobacco. ²⁴⁸There was absolutely no clue of any kind. ²⁴⁹The only tangible fact was that the commissioner's wife—Mrs. Tangey was the name—had hurried out of the place. ²⁵⁰He could give no explanation save that it was about the time when the woman always went home. ²⁵¹The policeman and I agreed that our best plan would be to seize the woman before she could get rid of the papers, presuming that she had them.

²⁵²“The alarm had reached Scotland Yard by this time, and Mr. Forbes, the detective, came round at once and took up the case with a great deal of energy. ²⁵³We hired a hansom, and in half an hour we were at the address which had been given to us. ²⁵⁴A young woman opened the door, who proved to be Mrs. Tangey's eldest daughter. ²⁵⁵Her mother had not come back yet, and we were shown into the front room to wait.

²⁵⁶“About ten minutes later a knock came at the door, and here we made the one serious mistake for which I blame myself. ²⁵⁷Instead of opening the door ourselves, we allowed the girl to do so. ²⁵⁸We heard her say, ‘Mother, there are two men in the house waiting to see you,’ and an instant afterwards we heard the patter of feet rushing down the passage. ²⁵⁹Forbes flung open the door, and we both ran

into the back room or kitchen, but the woman had got there before us. ²⁶⁰She stared at us with defiant eyes, and then, suddenly recognizing me, an expression of absolute astonishment came over her face.

²⁶¹“Why, if it isn't Mr. Phelps, of the office!” she cried.

²⁶²“Come, come, who did you think we were when you ran away from us?” asked my companion.

²⁶³“I thought you were the brokers,” said she, “we have had some trouble with a tradesman.”

²⁶⁴“That's not quite good enough,” answered Forbes. ²⁶⁵“We have reason to believe that you have taken a paper of importance from the Foreign Office, and that you ran in here to dispose of it. ²⁶⁶You must come back with us to Scotland Yard to be searched.”

²⁶⁷“It was in vain that she protested and resisted. ²⁶⁸A four-wheeler was brought, and we all three drove back in it. ²⁶⁹We had first made an examination of the kitchen, and especially of the kitchen fire, to see whether she might have made away with the papers during the instant that she was alone. ²⁷⁰There were no signs, however, of any ashes or scraps. ²⁷¹When we reached Scotland Yard she was handed over at once to the female searcher. ²⁷²I waited in an agony of suspense until she came back with her report. ²⁷³There were no signs of the papers.

²⁷⁴“Then for the first time the horror of my situation came in its full force. ²⁷⁵Hitherto I had been acting, and action had numbed thought. ²⁷⁶I had been so confident of regaining the treaty at once that I had not dared to think of what would be the consequence if I failed to do so. ²⁷⁷But now there was nothing more to be done, and I had leisure to realize my position. ²⁷⁸It was horrible. ²⁷⁹Watson there would tell you that I was a nervous, sensitive boy at school. ²⁸⁰It is my nature. ²⁸¹I thought of my uncle and of his colleagues in the Cabinet, of the shame which I had brought upon him, upon myself, upon every one connected with me. ²⁸²What though I was the victim of an extraordinary accident? ²⁸³No allowance is made for accidents where diplomatic interests are at stake. ²⁸⁴I was ruined, shamefully, hopelessly ruined. ²⁸⁵I don't know what I did. I fancy I must have made a scene. ²⁸⁶I have a dim recollection of a group of officials who crowded round me, endeavoring to soothe me. ²⁸⁷One of them drove down with me to Waterloo, and saw me into the Woking train. ²⁸⁸I believe that he would have come all the way had it not been that Dr. Ferrier, who lives near me, was going down by that very train. ²⁸⁹The doctor most kindly took charge of me, and it was well he did so, for I had a fit in the station, and before we reached home I was practically a raving maniac.

²⁹⁰“You can imagine the state of things here when they were roused from their beds by the doctor's ringing and found me in this condition. ²⁹¹Poor Annie here and my mother were broken-hearted. ²⁹²Dr. Ferrier had just heard enough from the detective at the station to be able to give an idea of what had happened, and his story did not mend matters. ²⁹³It was evident to all that I was in for a long illness, so Joseph was bundled out of this cheery bedroom, and it was turned into a sick-room for me. ²⁹⁴Here I have lain, Mr. Holmes, for over nine weeks, unconscious, and raving with brain-fever. ²⁹⁵If it had not been for Miss Harrison here and for the doctor's care I should not be speaking to you now. ²⁹⁶She has nursed me by day and a hired nurse has looked after me by night, for in my mad fits I was capable of anything. ²⁹⁷Slowly my reason has cleared, but it is only during the last three days that my memory has quite returned. ²⁹⁸Sometimes I wish that it never had. ²⁹⁹The first thing that I did was to wire to Mr. Forbes, who had the case in hand. ³⁰⁰He came out, and assures me that, though everything has been done, no trace of a clue has been discovered. ³⁰¹The commissioner and his wife have been examined in every way without any light being thrown upon the matter. ³⁰²The suspicions of the police then rested upon young Gorot, who, as you may remember, stayed over time in the office that night. ³⁰³His remaining behind and his French name were really the only two points which could suggest suspicion; but, as a matter of fact, I did not begin work until he had gone, and his people are of Huguenot extraction, but as English in sympathy and tradition as you and I are. ³⁰⁴Nothing was found to implicate him in any way, and there the matter dropped. ³⁰⁵I turn to you, Mr. Holmes, as absolutely my last hope. ³⁰⁶If you fail me, then my honor as well as my position are forever forfeited.”

³⁰⁷The invalid sank back upon his cushions, tired out by this long recital, while his nurse poured him out a glass of some stimulating medicine. ³⁰⁸Holmes sat silently, with his head thrown back and his eyes closed, in an attitude which might seem listless to a stranger, but which I knew betokened the most intense self-absorption.

³⁰⁹“Your statement has been so explicit,” said he at last, “that you have really left me very few questions to ask. ³¹⁰There is one of the very utmost importance, however. ³¹¹Did you tell any one that you had this special task to perform?”

³¹²“No one.”

³¹³“Not Miss Harrison here, for example?”

³¹⁴“No. ³¹⁵I had not been back to Woking between getting the order and executing the commission.”

³¹⁶“And none of your people had by chance been to see you?”

³¹⁷“None.”

³¹⁸“Did any of them know their way about in the office?”

³¹⁹“Oh, yes, all of them had been shown over it.”

³²⁰“Still, of course, if you said nothing to any one about the treaty these inquiries are irrelevant.”

³²¹“I said nothing.”

³²²“Do you know anything of the commissioner?”

³²³“Nothing except that he is an old soldier.”

³²⁴“What regiment?”

³²⁵“Oh, I have heard—Coldstream Guards.”

³²⁶“Thank you. ³²⁷I have no doubt I can get details from Forbes. ³²⁸The authorities are excellent at amassing facts, though they do not always use them to advantage. ³²⁹What a lovely thing a rose is!”

³³⁰He walked past the couch to the open window, and held up the drooping stalk of a moss-rose, looking down at the dainty blend of crimson and green. ³³¹It was a new phase of his character to me, for I had never before seen him show any keen interest in natural objects.

³³²“There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion,” said he, leaning with his back against the shutters. ³³³“It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. ³³⁴Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. ³³⁵All other things, our powers our desires, our food, are all really necessary for our existence in the first instance. ³³⁶But this rose is an extra. ³³⁷Its smell and its color are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. ³³⁸It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers.”

³³⁹Percy Phelps and his nurse looked at Holmes during this demonstration with surprise and a good deal of disappointment written upon their faces. ³⁴⁰He had fallen into a reverie, with the moss-rose between his fingers. ³⁴¹It had lasted some minutes before the young lady broke in upon it.

³⁴²“Do you see any prospect of solving this mystery, Mr. Holmes?” she asked, with a touch of asperity in her voice.

³⁴³“Oh, the mystery!” he answered, coming back with a start to the realities of life. ³⁴⁴“Well, it would be absurd to deny that the case is a very abstruse and complicated one, but I can promise you that I will look into the matter and let you know any points which may strike me.”

³⁴⁵“Do you see any clue?”

³⁴⁶“You have furnished me with seven, but, of course, I must test them before I can pronounce upon their value.”

³⁴⁷“You suspect some one?”

³⁴⁸“I suspect myself.”

³⁴⁹“What!”

³⁵⁰“Of coming to conclusions too rapidly.”

³⁵¹“Then go to London and test your conclusions.”

³⁵²“Your advice is very excellent, Miss Harrison,” said Holmes, rising. ³⁵³“I think, Watson, we cannot do better. ³⁵⁴Do not allow yourself to indulge in false hopes, Mr. Phelps. ³⁵⁵The affair is a very tangled one.”

³⁵⁶“I shall be in a fever until I see you again,” cried the diplomatist.

³⁵⁷“Well, I'll come out by the same train to-morrow, though it's more than likely that my report will be a negative one.”

³⁵⁸“God bless you for promising to come,” cried our client. ³⁵⁹“It gives me fresh life to know that something is being done. ³⁶⁰By the way, I have had a letter from Lord Holdhurst.”

³⁶¹“Ha! ³⁶²What did he say?”

³⁶³“He was cold, but not harsh. ³⁶⁴I dare say my severe illness prevented him from being that. ³⁶⁵He repeated that the matter was of the utmost importance, and added that no steps would be taken about my future—by which he means, of course, my dismissal—until my health was restored and I had an opportunity of repairing my misfortune.”

³⁶⁶“Well, that was reasonable and considerate,” said Holmes. ³⁶⁷“Come, Watson, for we have a good day's work before us in town.”

³⁶⁸Mr. Joseph Harrison drove us down to the station, and we were soon whirling up in a Portsmouth train. ³⁶⁹Holmes was sunk in profound thought, and hardly opened his mouth until we had passed Clapham Junction.

³⁷⁰“It's a very cheery thing to come into London by any of these lines which run high, and allow you to look down upon the houses like this.”

³⁷¹I thought he was joking, for the view was sordid enough, but he soon explained himself.

³⁷²“Look at those big, isolated clumps of building rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-colored sea.”

³⁷³“The board-schools.”

³⁷⁴“Light-houses, my boy! ³⁷⁵Beacons of the future! ³⁷⁶Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wise, better England of the future. ³⁷⁷I suppose that man Phelps does not drink?”

³⁷⁸“I should not think so.”

³⁷⁹“Nor should I, but we are bound to take every possibility into account. ³⁸⁰The poor devil has certainly got himself into very deep water, and it's a question whether we shall ever be able to get him ashore. ³⁸¹What did you think of Miss Harrison?”

³⁸²“A girl of strong character.”

³⁸³“Yes, but she is a good sort, or I am mistaken. ³⁸⁴She and her brother are the only children of an iron-master somewhere up Northumberland way. ³⁸⁵He got engaged to her when traveling last winter, and she came down to be introduced to his people, with her brother as escort. ³⁸⁶Then came the smash, and she stayed on to nurse her lover, while brother Joseph, finding himself pretty snug, stayed on too. ³⁸⁷I've been making a few independent inquiries, you see. ³⁸⁸But to-day must be a day of inquiries.”

³⁸⁹“My practice—” I began.

³⁹⁰“Oh, if you find your own cases more interesting than mine—” said Holmes, with some asperity.

³⁹¹“I was going to say that my practice could get along very well for a day or two, since it is the slackest time in the year.”

³⁹²“Excellent,” said he, recovering his good-humor. ³⁹³“Then we'll look into this matter together. ³⁹⁴I think that we should begin by seeing Forbes. ³⁹⁵He can probably tell us all the details we want until we know from what side the case is to be approached.”

³⁹⁶“You said you had a clue?”

³⁹⁷“Well, we have several, but we can only test their value by further inquiry. ³⁹⁸The most difficult crime to track is the one which is purposeless. ³⁹⁹Now this is not purposeless. ⁴⁰⁰Who is it who profits by it? ⁴⁰¹There is the French ambassador, there is the Russian, there is who-ever might sell it to either of these, and there is Lord Holdhurst.”

⁴⁰²“Lord Holdhurst!”

⁴⁰³“Well, it is just conceivable that a statesman might find himself in a position where he was not sorry to have such a document accidentally destroyed.”

⁴⁰⁴“Not a statesman with the honorable record of Lord Holdhurst?”

⁴⁰⁵“It is a possibility and we cannot afford to disregard it. ⁴⁰⁶We shall see the noble lord to-day and find out if he can tell us anything. ⁴⁰⁷Meanwhile I have already set inquiries on foot.”

⁴⁰⁸“Already?”

⁴⁰⁹“Yes, I sent wires from Woking station to every evening paper in London. ⁴¹⁰This advertisement will appear in each of them.”

⁴¹¹He handed over a sheet torn from a note-book. ⁴¹²On it was scribbled in pencil:

⁴¹³“£10 reward. ⁴¹⁴The number of the cab which dropped a fare at or about the door of the Foreign Office in Charles Street at quarter to ten in the evening of May 23d. Apply 221b, Baker Street.”

⁴¹⁵“You are confident that the thief came in a cab?”

⁴¹⁶“If not, there is no harm done. ⁴¹⁷But if Mr. Phelps is correct in stating that there is no hiding-place either in the room or the corridors, then the person must have come from outside. ⁴¹⁸If he came from outside on so wet a night, and yet left no trace of damp upon the linoleum, which was examined within a few minutes of his passing, then it is exceeding probably that he came in a cab. ⁴¹⁹Yes, I think that we may safely deduce a cab.”

⁴²⁰“It sounds plausible.”

⁴²¹“That is one of the clues of which I spoke. It may lead us to something. ⁴²²And then, of course, there is the bell—which is the most distinctive feature of the case. ⁴²³Why should the bell ring? ⁴²⁴Was it the thief who did it out of bravado? ⁴²⁵Or was it some one who was with the thief who did it in order to prevent the crime? ⁴²⁶Or was it an accident? ⁴²⁷Or was it—?” ⁴²⁸He sank back into the state of intense and silent thought from which he had emerged; but it seemed to me, accustomed as I was to his every mood, that some new possibility had dawned suddenly upon him.

⁴²⁹It was twenty past three when we reached our terminus, and after a hasty luncheon at the buffet we pushed on at once to Scotland Yard. ⁴³⁰Holmes had already wired to Forbes, and we found him waiting to receive us—a small, foxy man with a sharp but by no means amiable expression. ⁴³¹He was decidedly frigid in his manner to us, especially when he heard the errand upon which we had come.

⁴³²“I’ve heard of your methods before now, Mr. Holmes,” said he, tartly. ⁴³³“You are ready enough to use all the information that the police can lay at your disposal, and then you try to finish the case yourself and bring discredit on them.”

⁴³⁴“On the contrary,” said Holmes, “out of my last fifty-three cases my name has only appeared in four, and the police have had all the credit in forty-nine. ⁴³⁵I don’t blame you for not knowing this, for you are young and inexperienced, but if you wish to get on in your new duties you will work with me and not against me.”

⁴³⁶“I’d be very glad of a hint or two,” said the detective, changing his manner. ⁴³⁷“I’ve certainly had no credit from the case so far.”

⁴³⁸“What steps have you taken?”

⁴³⁹“Tangey, the commissionaire, has been shadowed. ⁴⁴⁰He left the Guards with a good character and we can find nothing against him. ⁴⁴¹His wife is a bad lot, though. ⁴⁴²I fancy she knows more about this than appears.”

⁴⁴³“Have you shadowed her?”

⁴⁴⁴“We have set one of our women on to her. ⁴⁴⁵Mrs. Tangey drinks, and our woman has been with her twice when she was well on, but she could get nothing out of her.”

⁴⁴⁶“I understand that they have had brokers in the house?”

⁴⁴⁷“Yes, but they were paid off.”

⁴⁴⁸“Where did the money come from?”

⁴⁴⁹“That was all right. ⁴⁵⁰His pension was due. ⁴⁵¹They have not shown any sign of being in funds.”

⁴⁵²“What explanation did she give of having answered the bell when Mr. Phelps rang for the coffee?”

⁴⁵³“She said that her husband was very tired and she wished to relieve him.”

⁴⁵⁴“Well, certainly that would agree with his being found a little later asleep in his chair. ⁴⁵⁵There is nothing against them then but the woman’s character. ⁴⁵⁶Did you ask her why she hurried away that night? ⁴⁵⁷Her haste attracted the attention of the police constable.”

⁴⁵⁸“She was later than usual and wanted to get home.”

⁴⁵⁹“Did you point out to her that you and Mr. Phelps, who started at least twenty minutes after he, got home before her?”

⁴⁶⁰“She explains that by the difference between a ‘bus and a hansom.”

⁴⁶¹“Did she make it clear why, on reaching her house, she ran into the back kitchen?”

⁴⁶²“Because she had the money there with which to pay off the brokers.”

⁴⁶³“She has at least an answer for everything. ⁴⁶⁴Did you ask her whether in leaving she met any one or saw any one loitering about Charles Street?”

⁴⁶⁵“She saw no one but the constable.”

⁴⁶⁶“Well, you seem to have cross-examined her pretty thoroughly. ⁴⁶⁷What else have you done?”

⁴⁶⁸“The clerk Gorot has been shadowed all these nine weeks, but without result. ⁴⁶⁹We can show nothing against him.”

⁴⁷⁰“Anything else?”

⁴⁷¹“Well, we have nothing else to go upon—no evidence of any kind.”

⁴⁷²“Have you formed a theory about how that bell rang?”

⁴⁷³“Well, I must confess that it beats me. ⁴⁷⁴It was a cool hand, whoever it was, to go and give the alarm like that.”

⁴⁷⁵“Yes, it was a queer thing to do. ⁴⁷⁶Many thanks to you for what you have told me. ⁴⁷⁷If I can put the man into your hands you shall hear from me. ⁴⁷⁸Come along, Watson.”

⁴⁷⁹“Where are we going to now?” I asked, as we left the office.

⁴⁸⁰“We are now going to interview Lord Holdhurst, the cabinet minister and future premier of England.”

⁴⁸¹We were fortunate in finding that Lord Holdhurst was still in his chambers in Downing Street, and on Holmes sending in his card we were instantly shown up. ⁴⁸²The statesman received us with that old-fashioned courtesy for which he is remarkable, and seated us on the two luxuriant lounges on either side of the fireplace. ⁴⁸³Standing on the rug between us, with his slight, tall figure, his sharp features, thoughtful face, and curling hair prematurely tinged with gray, he seemed to represent that not too common type, a nobleman who is in truth noble.

⁴⁸⁴“Your name is very familiar to me, Mr. Holmes,” said he, smiling. ⁴⁸⁵“And, of course, I cannot pretend to be ignorant of the object of your visit. ⁴⁸⁶There has only been one occurrence in these offices which could call for your attention. ⁴⁸⁷In whose interest are you acting, may I ask?”

⁴⁸⁸“In that of Mr. Percy Phelps,” answered Holmes.

⁴⁸⁹“Ah, my unfortunate nephew! ⁴⁹⁰You can understand that our kinship makes it the more impossible for me to screen him in any way. ⁴⁹¹I fear that the incident must have a very prejudicial effect upon his career.”

⁴⁹²“But if the document is found?”

⁴⁹³“Ah, that, of course, would be different.”

⁴⁹⁴“I had one or two questions which I wished to ask you, Lord Holdhurst.”

⁴⁹⁵“I shall be happy to give you any information in my power.”

⁴⁹⁶“Was it in this room that you gave your instructions as to the copying of the document?”

⁴⁹⁷“It was.”

⁴⁹⁸“Then you could hardly have been overheard?”

⁴⁹⁹“It is out of the question.”

⁵⁰⁰“Did you ever mention to any one that it was your intention to give any one the treaty to be copied?”

⁵⁰¹“Never.”

⁵⁰²“You are certain of that?”

⁵⁰³“Absolutely.”

⁵⁰⁴“Well, since you never said so, and Mr. Phelps never said so, and nobody else knew anything of the matter, then the thief's presence in the room was purely accidental. ⁵⁰⁵He saw his chance and he took it.”

⁵⁰⁶The statesman smiled. ⁵⁰⁷“You take me out of my province there,” said he.

⁵⁰⁸Holmes considered for a moment. ⁵⁰⁹“There is another very important point which I wish to discuss with you,” said he. ⁵¹⁰“You feared, as I understand, that very grave results might follow from the details of this treaty becoming known.”

⁵¹¹A shadow passed over the expressive face of the statesman. ⁵¹²“Very grave results indeed.”

⁵¹³“And have they occurred?”

⁵¹⁴“Not yet.”

⁵¹⁵“If the treaty had reached, let us say, the French or Russian Foreign Office, you would expect to hear of it?”

⁵¹⁶“I should,” said Lord Holdhurst, with a wry face.

⁵¹⁷“Since nearly ten weeks have elapsed, then, and nothing has been heard, it is not unfair to suppose that for some reason the treaty has not reached them.”

⁵¹⁸Lord Holdhurst shrugged his shoulders.

⁵¹⁹“We can hardly suppose, Mr. Holmes, that the thief took the treaty in order to frame it and hang it up.”

⁵²⁰“Perhaps he is waiting for a better price.”

⁵²¹“If he waits a little longer he will get no price at all. ⁵²²The treaty will cease to be secret in a few months.”

⁵²³“That is most important,” said Holmes. ⁵²⁴“Of course, it is a possible supposition that the thief has had a sudden illness—”

⁵²⁵“An attack of brain-fever, for example?” asked the statesman, flashing a swift glance at him.

⁵²⁶“I did not say so,” said Holmes, imperturbably. ⁵²⁷“And now, Lord Holdhurst, we have already taken up too much of your valuable time, and we shall wish you good-day.”

⁵²⁸“Every success to your investigation, be the criminal who it may,” answered the nobleman, as he bowed us out the door.

⁵²⁹“He's a fine fellow,” said Holmes, as we came out into Whitehall. ⁵³⁰“But he has a struggle to keep up his position. ⁵³¹He is far from rich and has many calls. ⁵³²You noticed, of course, that his boots had been re-soled? ⁵³³Now, Watson, I won't detain you from your legitimate work any longer. ⁵³⁴I shall do nothing more to-day, unless I have an answer to my cab advertisement. ⁵³⁵But I should be extremely obliged to you if you would come down with me to Woking to-morrow, by the same train which we took yesterday.”

⁵³⁶I met him accordingly next morning and we traveled down to Woking together. ⁵³⁷He had had no answer to his advertisement, he said, and no fresh light had been thrown upon the case. ⁵³⁸He had, when he so willed it, the utter immobility of countenance of a red Indian, and I could not gather from his appearance whether he was satisfied or not with the position of the case. ⁵³⁹His conversation, I remember, was about the Bertillon system of measurements, and he expressed his enthusiastic admiration of the French savant.

⁵⁴⁰We found our client still under the charge of his devoted nurse, but looking considerably better than before. ⁵⁴¹He rose from the sofa and greeted us without difficulty when we entered.

⁵⁴²"Any news?" he asked, eagerly.

⁵⁴³"My report, as I expected, is a negative one," said Holmes. ⁵⁴⁴"I have seen Forbes, and I have seen your uncle, and I have set one or two trains of inquiry upon foot which may lead to something."

⁵⁴⁵"You have not lost heart, then?"

⁵⁴⁶"By no means."

⁵⁴⁷"God bless you for saying that!" cried Miss Harrison. ⁵⁴⁸"If we keep our courage and our patience the truth must come out."

⁵⁴⁹"We have more to tell you than you have for us," said Phelps, reseating himself upon the couch.

⁵⁵⁰"I hoped you might have something."

⁵⁵¹"Yes, we have had an adventure during the night, and one which might have proved to be a serious one." ⁵⁵²His expression grew very grave as he spoke, and a look of something akin to fear sprang up in his eyes. ⁵⁵³"Do you know," said he, "that I begin to believe that I am the unconscious centre of some monstrous conspiracy, and that my life is aimed at as well as my honor?"

⁵⁵⁴"Ah!" cried Holmes.

⁵⁵⁵"It sounds incredible, for I have not, as far as I know, an enemy in the world. ⁵⁵⁶Yet from last night's experience I can come to no other conclusion."

⁵⁵⁷"Pray let me hear it."

⁵⁵⁸"You must know that last night was the very first night that I have ever slept without a nurse in the room. ⁵⁵⁹I was so much better that I thought I could dispense with one. ⁵⁶⁰I had a night-light burning, however. ⁵⁶¹Well, about two in the morning I had sunk into a light sleep when I was suddenly aroused by a slight noise. ⁵⁶²It was like the sound which a mouse makes when it is gnawing a plank, and I lay listening to it for some time under the impression that it must come from that cause. ⁵⁶³Then it grew louder, and suddenly there came from the window a sharp metallic snick. ⁵⁶⁴I sat up in amazement. ⁵⁶⁵There could be no doubt what the sounds were now. ⁵⁶⁶The first ones had been caused by some one forcing an instrument through the slit between the sashes, and the second by the catch being pressed back.

⁵⁶⁷"There was a pause then for about ten minutes, as if the person were waiting to see whether the noise had awakened me. ⁵⁶⁸Then I heard a gentle creaking as the window was very slowly opened. ⁵⁶⁹I could stand it no longer, for my nerves are not what they used to be. ⁵⁷⁰I sprang out of bed and flung open the shutters. ⁵⁷¹A man was crouching at the window. ⁵⁷²I could see little of him, for he was gone like a flash. ⁵⁷³He was wrapped in some sort of cloak which came across the lower part of his face. ⁵⁷⁴One thing only I am sure of, and that is that he had some weapon in his hand. ⁵⁷⁵It looked to me like a long knife. ⁵⁷⁶I distinctly saw the gleam of it as he turned to run."

⁵⁷⁷"This is most interesting," said Holmes. ⁵⁷⁸"Pray what did you do then?"

⁵⁷⁹“I should have followed him through the open window if I had been stronger. ⁵⁸⁰As it was, I rang the bell and roused the house. ⁵⁸¹It took me some little time, for the bell rings in the kitchen and the servants all sleep upstairs. ⁵⁸²I shouted, however, and that brought Joseph down, and he roused the others. ⁵⁸³Joseph and the groom found marks on the bed outside the window, but the weather has been so dry lately that they found it hopeless to follow the trail across the grass. ⁵⁸⁴There's a place, however, on the wooden fence which skirts the road which shows signs, they tell me, as if some one had got over, and had snapped the top of the rail in doing so. ⁵⁸⁵I have said nothing to the local police yet, for I thought I had best have your opinion first.”

⁵⁸⁶This tale of our client's appeared to have an extraordinary effect upon Sherlock Holmes. ⁵⁸⁷He rose from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable excitement.

⁵⁸⁸“Misfortunes never come single,” said Phelps, smiling, though it was evident that his adventure had somewhat shaken him.

⁵⁸⁹“You have certainly had your share,” said Holmes. ⁵⁹⁰“Do you think you could walk round the house with me?”

⁵⁹¹“Oh, yes, I should like a little sunshine. ⁵⁹²Joseph will come, too.”

⁵⁹³“And I also,” said Miss Harrison.

⁵⁹⁴“I am afraid not,” said Holmes, shaking his head. ⁵⁹⁵“I think I must ask you to remain sitting exactly where you are.”

⁵⁹⁶The young lady resumed her seat with an air of displeasure. ⁵⁹⁷Her brother, however, had joined us and we set off all four together. ⁵⁹⁸We passed round the lawn to the outside of the young diplomatist's window. ⁵⁹⁹There were, as he had said, marks upon the bed, but they were hopelessly blurred and vague. ⁶⁰⁰Holmes stopped over them for an instant, and then rose shrugging his shoulders.

⁶⁰¹“I don't think any one could make much of this,” said he. ⁶⁰²“Let us go round the house and see why this particular room was chose by the burglar. ⁶⁰³I should have thought those larger windows of the drawing-room and dining-room would have had more attractions for him.”

⁶⁰⁴“They are more visible from the road,” suggested Mr. Joseph Harrison.

⁶⁰⁵“Ah, yes, of course. ⁶⁰⁶There is a door here which he might have attempted. ⁶⁰⁷What is it for?”

⁶⁰⁸“It is the side entrance for trades-people. ⁶⁰⁹Of course it is locked at night.”

⁶¹⁰“Have you ever had an alarm like this before?”

⁶¹¹“Never,” said our client.

⁶¹²“Do you keep plate in the house, or anything to attract burglars?”

⁶¹³“Nothing of value.”

⁶¹⁴Holmes strolled round the house with his hands in his pockets and a negligent air which was unusual with him.

⁶¹⁵“By the way,” said he to Joseph Harrison, “you found some place, I understand, where the fellow scaled the fence. ⁶¹⁶Let us have a look at that!”

⁶¹⁷The plump young man led us to a spot where the top of one of the wooden rails had been cracked.

⁶¹⁸A small fragment of the wood was hanging down. ⁶¹⁹Holmes pulled it off and examined it critically.

⁶²⁰“Do you think that was done last night? ⁶²¹It looks rather old, does it not?”

⁶²²“Well, possibly so.”

⁶²³“There are no marks of any one jumping down upon the other side. ⁶²⁴No, I fancy we shall get no help here. ⁶²⁵Let us go back to the bedroom and talk the matter over.”

⁶²⁶Percy Phelps was walking very slowly, leaning upon the arm of his future brother-in-law. ⁶²⁷Holmes walked swiftly across the lawn, and we were at the open window of the bedroom long before the others came up.

⁶²⁸“Miss Harrison,” said Holmes, speaking with the utmost intensity of manner, “you must stay where you are all day. ⁶²⁹Let nothing prevent you from staying where you are all day. ⁶³⁰It is of the utmost importance.”

⁶³¹“Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Holmes,” said the girl in astonishment.

⁶³²“When you go to bed lock the door of this room on the outside and keep the key. ⁶³³Promise to do this.”

⁶³⁴“But Percy?”

⁶³⁵“He will come to London with us.”

⁶³⁶“And am I to remain here?”

⁶³⁷“It is for his sake. ⁶³⁸You can serve him. ⁶³⁹Quick! ⁶⁴⁰Promise!”

⁶⁴¹She gave a quick nod of assent just as the other two came up.

⁶⁴²“Why do you sit moping there, Annie?” cried her brother. ⁶⁴³“Come out into the sunshine!”

⁶⁴⁴“No, thank you, Joseph. ⁶⁴⁵I have a slight headache and this room is deliciously cool and soothing.”

⁶⁴⁶“What do you propose now, Mr. Holmes?” asked our client.

⁶⁴⁷“Well, in investigating this minor affair we must not lose sight of our main inquiry. ⁶⁴⁸It would be a very great help to me if you would come up to London with us.”

⁶⁴⁹“At once?”

⁶⁵⁰“Well, as soon as you conveniently can. ⁶⁵¹Say in an hour.”

⁶⁵²“I feel quite strong enough, if I can really be of any help.”

⁶⁵³“The greatest possible.”

⁶⁵⁴“Perhaps you would like me to stay there to-night?”

⁶⁵⁵“I was just going to propose it.”

⁶⁵⁶“Then, if my friend of the night comes to revisit me, he will find the bird flown. ⁶⁵⁷We are all in your hands, Mr. Holmes, and you must tell us exactly what you would like done. ⁶⁵⁸Perhaps you would prefer that Joseph came with us so as to look after me?”

⁶⁵⁹“Oh, no; my friend Watson is a medical man, you know, and he'll look after you. ⁶⁶⁰We'll have our lunch here, if you will permit us, and then we shall all three set off for town together.”

⁶⁶¹It was arranged as he suggested, though Miss Harrison excused herself from leaving the bedroom, in accordance with Holmes's suggestion. ⁶⁶²What the object of my friend's manoeuvres was I could not conceive, unless it were to keep the lady away from Phelps, who, rejoiced by his returning health and by the prospect of action, lunched with us in the dining-room. ⁶⁶³Holmes had still more startling surprise

for us, however, for, after accompanying us down to the station and seeing us into our carriage, he calmly announced that he had no intention of leaving Woking.

⁶⁶⁴“There are one or two small points which I should desire to clear up before I go,” said he. ⁶⁶⁵“Your absence, Mr. Phelps, will in some ways rather assist me. ⁶⁶⁶Watson, when you reach London you would oblige me by driving at once to Baker Street with our friend here, and remaining with him until I see you again. ⁶⁶⁷It is fortunate that you are old school-fellows, as you must have much to talk over. ⁶⁶⁸Mr. Phelps can have the spare bedroom to-night, and I will be with you in time for breakfast, for there is a train which will take me into Waterloo at eight.”

⁶⁶⁹“But how about our investigation in London?” asked Phelps, ruefully.

⁶⁷⁰“We can do that to-morrow. ⁶⁷¹I think that just at present I can be of more immediate use here.”

⁶⁷²“You might tell them at Briarbrae that I hope to be back to-morrow night,” cried Phelps, as we began to move from the platform.

⁶⁷³“I hardly expect to go back to Briarbrae,” answered Holmes, and waved his hand to us cheerily as we shot out from the station.

⁶⁷⁴Phelps and I talked it over on our journey, but neither of us could devise a satisfactory reason for this new development.

⁶⁷⁵“I suppose he wants to find out some clue as to the burglary last night, if a burglar it was. ⁶⁷⁶For myself, I don't believe it was an ordinary thief.”

⁶⁷⁷“What is your own idea, then?”

⁶⁷⁸“Upon my word, you may put it down to my weak nerves or not, but I believe there is some deep political intrigue going on around me, and that for some reason that passes my understanding my life is aimed at by the conspirators. ⁶⁷⁹It sounds high-flown and absurd, but consider the facts! ⁶⁸⁰Why should a thief try to break in at a bedroom window, where there could be no hope of any plunder, and why should he come with a long knife in his hand?”

⁶⁸¹“You are sure it was not a house-breaker's jimmy?”

⁶⁸²“Oh, no, it was a knife. ⁶⁸³I saw the flash of the blade quite distinctly.”

⁶⁸⁴“But why on earth should you be pursued with such animosity?”

⁶⁸⁵“Ah, that is the question.”

⁶⁸⁶“Well, if Holmes takes the same view, that would account for his action, would it not? ⁶⁸⁷Presuming that your theory is correct, if he can lay his hands upon the man who threatened you last night he will have gone a long way towards finding who took the naval treaty. ⁶⁸⁸It is absurd to suppose that you have two enemies, one of whom robs you, while the other threatens your life.”

⁶⁸⁹“But Holmes said that he was not going to Briarbrae.”

⁶⁹⁰“I have known him for some time,” said I, “but I never knew him do anything yet without a very good reason,” and with that our conversation drifted off on to other topics.

⁶⁹¹But it was a weary day for me. ⁶⁹²Phelps was still weak after his long illness, and his misfortune made him querulous and nervous. ⁶⁹³In vain I endeavored to interest him in Afghanistan, in India, in social questions, in anything which might take his mind out of the groove. ⁶⁹⁴He would always come back to his lost treaty, wondering, guessing, speculating, as to what Holmes was doing, what steps Lord Holdhurst was taking, what news we should have in the morning. ⁶⁹⁵As the evening wore on his excitement became quite painful.

⁶⁹⁶“You have implicit faith in Holmes?” he asked.

⁶⁹⁷“I have seen him do some remarkable things.”

⁶⁹⁸“But he never brought light into anything quite so dark as this?”

⁶⁹⁹“Oh, yes, I have known him solve questions which presented fewer clues than yours.”

⁷⁰⁰“But not where such large interests are at stake?”

⁷⁰¹“I don't know that. ⁷⁰²To my certain knowledge he has acted on behalf of three of the reigning houses of Europe in very vital matters.”

⁷⁰³“But you know him well, Watson. ⁷⁰⁴He is such an inscrutable fellow that I never quite know what to make of him. ⁷⁰⁵Do you think he is hopeful? ⁷⁰⁶Do you think he expects to make a success of it?”

⁷⁰⁷“He has said nothing.”

⁷⁰⁸“That is a bad sign.”

⁷⁰⁹“On the contrary, I have noticed that when he is off the trail he generally says so. ⁷¹⁰It is when he is on a scent and is not quite absolutely sure yet that it is the right one that he is most taciturn. ⁷¹¹Now, my dear fellow, we can't help matters by making ourselves nervous about them, so let me implore you to go to bed and so be fresh for whatever may await us to-morrow.”

⁷¹²I was able at last to persuade my companion to take my advice, though I knew from his excited manner that there was not much hope of sleep for him. ⁷¹³Indeed, his mood was infectious, for I lay tossing half the night myself, brooding over this strange problem, and inventing a hundred theories, each of which was more impossible than the last. ⁷¹⁴Why had Holmes remained at Woking? ⁷¹⁵Why had he asked Miss Harrison to remain in the sick-room all day? ⁷¹⁶Why had he been so careful not to inform the people at Briarbrae that he intended to remain near them? ⁷¹⁷I cudgelled my brains until I fell asleep in the endeavor to find some explanation which would cover all these facts.

⁷¹⁸It was seven o'clock when I awoke, and I set off at once for Phelps's room, to find him haggard and spent after a sleepless night. ⁷¹⁹His first question was whether Holmes had arrived yet.

⁷²⁰“He'll be here when he promised,” said I, “and not an instant sooner or later.”

⁷²¹And my words were true, for shortly after eight a hansom dashed up to the door and our friend got out of it. ⁷²²Standing in the window we saw that his left hand was swathed in a bandage and that his face was very grim and pale. ⁷²³He entered the house, but it was some little time before he came upstairs.

⁷²⁴“He looks like a beaten man,” cried Phelps.

⁷²⁵I was forced to confess that he was right. ⁷²⁶“After all,” said I, “the clue of the matter lies probably here in town.”

⁷²⁷Phelps gave a groan.

⁷²⁸“I don't know how it is,” said he, “but I had hoped for so much from his return. ⁷²⁹But surely his hand was not tied up like that yesterday. ⁷³⁰What can be the matter?”

⁷³¹“You are not wounded, Holmes?” I asked, as my friend entered the room.

⁷³²“Tut, it is only a scratch through my own clumsiness,” he answered, nodding his good-mornings to us. ⁷³³“This case of yours, Mr. Phelps, is certainly one of the darkest which I have ever investigated.”

⁷³⁴“I feared that you would find it beyond you.”

⁷³⁵“It has been a most remarkable experience.”

⁷³⁶“That bandage tells of adventures,” said I. ⁷³⁷“Won’t you tell us what has happened?”

⁷³⁸“After breakfast, my dear Watson. ⁷³⁹Remember that I have breathed thirty miles of Surrey air this morning. ⁷⁴⁰I suppose that there has been no answer from my cabman advertisement? ⁷⁴¹Well, well, we cannot expect to score every time.”

⁷⁴²The table was all laid, and just as I was about to ring Mrs. Hudson entered with the tea and coffee. ⁷⁴³A few minutes later she brought in three covers, and we all drew up to the table, Holmes ravenous, I curious, and Phelps in the gloomiest state of depression.

⁷⁴⁴“Mrs. Hudson has risen to the occasion,” said Holmes, uncovering a dish of curried chicken. ⁷⁴⁵“Her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotch-woman. ⁷⁴⁶What have you here, Watson?”

⁷⁴⁷“Ham and eggs,” I answered.

⁷⁴⁸“Good! ⁷⁴⁹What are you going to take, Mr. Phelps—curried fowl or eggs, or will you help yourself?”

⁷⁵⁰“Thank you. ⁷⁵¹I can eat nothing,” said Phelps.

⁷⁵²“Oh, come! ⁷⁵³Try the dish before you.”

⁷⁵⁴“Thank you, I would really rather not.”

⁷⁵⁵“Well, then,” said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle, “I suppose that you have no objection to helping me?”

⁷⁵⁶Phelps raised the cover, and as he did so he uttered a scream, and sat there staring with a face as white as the plate upon which he looked. ⁷⁵⁷Across the centre of it was lying a little cylinder of blue-gray paper. ⁷⁵⁸He caught it up, devoured it with his eyes, and then danced madly about the room, passing it to his bosom and shrieking out in his delight. ⁷⁵⁹Then he fell back into an arm-chair so limp and exhausted with his own emotions that we had to pour brandy down his throat to keep him from fainting.

⁷⁶⁰“There! there!” said Holmes, soothing, patting him upon the shoulder. ⁷⁶¹“It was too bad to spring it on you like this, but Watson here will tell you that I never can resist a touch of the dramatic.”

⁷⁶²Phelps seized his hand and kissed it. ⁷⁶³“God bless you!” he cried. ⁷⁶⁴“You have saved my honor.”

⁷⁶⁵“Well, my own was at stake, you know,” said Holmes. ⁷⁶⁶“I assure you it is just as hateful to me to fail in a case as it can be to you to blunder over a commission.”

⁷⁶⁷Phelps thrust away the precious document into the innermost pocket of his coat.

⁷⁶⁸“I have not the heart to interrupt your breakfast any further, and yet I am dying to know how you got it and where it was.”

⁷⁶⁹Sherlock Holmes swallowed a cup of coffee, and turned his attention to the ham and eggs. ⁷⁷⁰Then he rose, lit his pipe, and settled himself down into his chair.

⁷⁷¹“I’ll tell you what I did first, and how I came to do it afterwards,” said he. ⁷⁷²“After leaving you at the station I went for a charming walk through some admirable Surrey scenery to a pretty little village called Ripley, where I had my tea at an inn, and took the precaution of filling my flask and of putting a paper of sandwiches in my pocket. ⁷⁷³There I remained until evening, when I set off for Woking again, and found myself in the high-road outside Briarbrae just after sunset.

⁷⁷⁴“Well, I waited until the road was clear—it is never a very frequented one at any time, I fancy—and then I clambered over the fence into the grounds.”

⁷⁷⁵“Surely the gate was open!” ejaculated Phelps.

⁷⁷⁶“Yes, but I have a peculiar taste in these matters. ⁷⁷⁷I chose the place where the three fir-trees stand, and behind their screen I got over without the least chance of any one in the house being able to see me.

⁷⁷⁸I crouched down among the bushes on the other side, and crawled from one to the other—witness the disreputable state of my trouser knees—until I had reached the clump of rhododendrons just opposite to your bedroom window. ⁷⁷⁹There I squatted down and awaited developments.

⁷⁸⁰“The blind was not down in your room, and I could see Miss Harrison sitting there reading by the table. ⁷⁸¹It was quarter-past ten when she closed her book, fastened the shutters, and retired.

⁷⁸²“I heard her shut the door, and felt quite sure that she had turned the key in the lock.”

⁷⁸³“The key!” ejaculated Phelps.

⁷⁸⁴“Yes, I had given Miss Harrison instructions to lock the door on the outside and take the key with her when she went to bed. ⁷⁸⁵She carried out every one of my injunctions to the letter, and certainly without her cooperation you would not have that paper in you coat-pocket. ⁷⁸⁶She departed then and the lights went out, and I was left squatting in the rhododendron-bush.

⁷⁸⁷“The night was fine, but still it was a very weary vigil. ⁷⁸⁸Of course it has the sort of excitement about it that the sportsman feels when he lies beside the water-course and waits for the big game. ⁷⁸⁹It was very long, though—almost as long, Watson, as when you and I waited in that deadly room when we looked into the little problem of the Speckled Band. ⁷⁹⁰There was a church-clock down at Woking which struck the quarters, and I thought more than once that it had stopped. ⁷⁹¹At last however about two in the morning, I suddenly heard the gentle sound of a bolt being pushed back and the creaking of a key. ⁷⁹²A moment later the servant's door was opened, and Mr. Joseph Harrison stepped out into the moonlight.”

⁷⁹³“Joseph!” ejaculated Phelps.

⁷⁹⁴“He was bare-headed, but he had a black coat thrown over his shoulder so that he could conceal his face in an instant if there were any alarm. ⁷⁹⁵He walked on tiptoe under the shadow of the wall, and when he reached the window he worked a long-bladed knife through the sash and pushed back the catch. ⁷⁹⁶Then he flung open the window, and putting his knife through the crack in the shutters, he thrust the bar up and swung them open.

⁷⁹⁷“From where I lay I had a perfect view of the inside of the room and of every one of his movements. ⁷⁹⁸He lit the two candles which stood upon the mantelpiece, and then he proceeded to turn back the corner of the carpet in the neighborhood of the door. ⁷⁹⁹Presently he stopped and picked out a square piece of board, such as is usually left to enable plumbers to get at the joints of the gas-pipes. ⁸⁰⁰This one covered, as a matter of fact, the T joint which gives off the pipe which supplies the kitchen underneath. ⁸⁰¹Out of this hiding-place he drew that little cylinder of paper, pushed down the board, rearranged the carpet, blew out the candles, and walked straight into my arms as I stood waiting for him outside the window.

⁸⁰²“Well, he has rather more viciousness than I gave him credit for, has Master Joseph. ⁸⁰³He flew at me with his knife, and I had to grasp him twice, and got a cut over the knuckles, before I had the upper hand of him. ⁸⁰⁴He looked murder out of the only eye he could see with when we had finished, but he listened to reason and gave up the papers. ⁸⁰⁵Having got them I let my man go, but I wired full particulars to Forbes this morning. ⁸⁰⁶If he is quick enough to catch his bird, well and good. ⁸⁰⁷But if, as I shrewdly suspect, he finds the nest empty before he gets there, why, all the better for the government. ⁸⁰⁸I fancy that Lord Holdhurst for one, and Mr. Percy Phelps for another, would very much rather that the affair never got as far as a police-court.

⁸⁰⁹“My God!” gasped our client. ⁸¹⁰“Do you tell me that during these long ten weeks of agony the stolen papers were within the very room with me all the time?”

⁸¹¹“So it was.”

⁸¹²“And Joseph! ⁸¹³Joseph a villain and a thief!”

⁸¹⁴“Hum! ⁸¹⁵I am afraid Joseph's character is a rather deeper and more dangerous one than one might judge from his appearance. ⁸¹⁶From what I have heard from him this morning, I gather that he has lost heavily in dabbling with stocks, and that he is ready to do anything on earth to better his fortunes. ⁸¹⁷Being an absolutely selfish man, when a chance presented itself he did not allow either his sister's happiness or your reputation to hold his hand.”

⁸¹⁸Percy Phelps sank back in his chair. ⁸¹⁹“My head whirls,” said he. ⁸²⁰“Your words have dazed me.”

⁸²¹“The principal difficulty in your case,” remarked Holmes, in his didactic fashion, “lay in the fact of there being too much evidence. ⁸²²What was vital was overlaid and hidden by what was irrelevant. ⁸²³Of all the facts which were presented to us we had to pick just those which we deemed to be essential, and then piece them together in their order, so as to reconstruct this very remarkable chain of events. ⁸²⁴I had already begun to suspect Joseph, from the fact that you had intended to travel home with him that night, and that therefore it was a likely enough thing that he should call for you, knowing the Foreign Office well, upon his way. ⁸²⁵When I heard that some one had been so anxious to get into the bedroom, in which no one but Joseph could have concealed anything—you told us in your narrative how you had turned Joseph out when you arrived with the doctor—my suspicions all changed to certainties, especially as the attempt was made on the first night upon which the nurse was absent, showing that the intruder was well acquainted with the ways of the house.”

⁸²⁶“How blind I have been!”

⁸²⁷“The facts of the case, as far as I have worked them out, are these: this Joseph Harrison entered the office through the Charles Street door, and knowing his way he walked straight into your room the instant after you left it. ⁸²⁸Finding no one there he promptly rang the bell, and at the instant that he did so his eyes caught the paper upon the table. ⁸²⁹A glance showed him that chance had put in his way a State document of immense value, and in an instant he had thrust it into his pocket and was gone. ⁸³⁰A few minutes elapsed, as you remember, before the sleepy commissioner drew your attention to the bell, and those were just enough to give the thief time to make his escape.

⁸³¹“He made his way to Woking by the first train, and having examined his booty and assured himself that it really was of immense value, he had concealed it in what he thought was a very safe place, with the intention of taking it out again in a day or two, and carrying it to the French embassy, or wherever he thought that a long price was to be had. ⁸³²Then came your sudden return. ⁸³³He, without a moment's warning, was bundled out of his room, and from that time onward there were always at least two of you there to prevent him from regaining his treasure. ⁸³⁴The situation to him must have been a maddening one. ⁸³⁵But at last he thought he saw his chance. ⁸³⁶He tried to steal in, but was baffled by your wakefulness. ⁸³⁷You remember that you did not take your usual draught that night.”

⁸³⁸“I remember.”

⁸³⁹“I fancy that he had taken steps to make that draught efficacious, and that he quite relied upon your being unconscious. ⁸⁴⁰Of course, I understood that he would repeat the attempt whenever it could be done with safety. ⁸⁴¹Your leaving the room gave him the chance he wanted. ⁸⁴²I kept Miss Harrison in it all day so that he might not anticipate us. ⁸⁴³Then, having given him the idea that the coast was clear, I kept guard as I have described. ⁸⁴⁴I already knew that the papers were probably in the room, but I had no desire to rip up all the planking and skirting in search of them. ⁸⁴⁵I let him take them, therefore, from

the hiding-place, and so saved myself an infinity of trouble. ⁸⁴⁶Is there any other point which I can make clear?"

⁸⁴⁷"Why did he try the window on the first occasion," I asked, "when he might have entered by the door?"

⁸⁴⁸"In reaching the door he would have to pass seven bedrooms. ⁸⁴⁹On the other hand, he could get out on to the lawn with ease. ⁸⁵⁰Anything else?"

⁸⁵¹"You do not think," asked Phelps, "that he had any murderous intention? ⁸⁵²The knife was only meant as a tool."

⁸⁵³"It may be so," answered Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. ⁸⁵⁴"I can only say for certain that Mr. Joseph Harrison is a gentleman to whose mercy I should be extremely unwilling to trust."

The Final Problem

¹It is with a heavy heart that I take up my pen to write these the last words in which I shall ever record the singular gifts by which my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes was distinguished. ²In an incoherent and, as I deeply feel, an entirely inadequate fashion, I have endeavored to give some account of my strange experiences in his company from the chance which first brought us together at the period of the "Study in Scarlet," up to the time of his interference in the matter of the "Naval Treaty"—an interference which had the unquestionable effect of preventing a serious international complication. ³It was my intention to have stopped there, and to have said nothing of that event which has created a void in my life which the lapse of two years has done little to fill. ⁴My hand has been forced, however, by the recent letters in which Colonel James Moriarty defends the memory of his brother, and I have no choice but to lay the facts before the public exactly as they occurred. ⁵I alone know the absolute truth of the matter, and I am satisfied that the time has come when no good purpose is to be served by its suppression. ⁶As far as I know, there have been only three accounts in the public press: that in the *Journal de Genève* on May 6th, 1891, the Reuter's despatch in the English papers on May 7th, and finally the recent letters to which I have alluded. ⁷Of these the first and second were extremely condensed, while the last is, as I shall now show, an absolute perversion of the facts. ⁸It lies with me to tell for the first time what really took place between Professor Moriarty and Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

⁹It may be remembered that after my marriage, and my subsequent start in private practice, the very intimate relations which had existed between Holmes and myself became to some extent modified. ¹⁰He still came to me from time to time when he desired a companion in his investigation, but these occasions grew more and more seldom, until I find that in the year 1890 there were only three cases of which I retain any record. ¹¹During the winter of that year and the early spring of 1891, I saw in the papers that he had been engaged by the French government upon a matter of supreme importance, and I received two notes from Holmes, dated from Narbonne and from Nîmes, from which I gathered that his stay in France was likely to be a long one. ¹²It was with some surprise, therefore, that I saw him walk into my consulting-room upon the evening of April 24th. ¹³It struck me that he was looking even paler and thinner than usual.

¹⁴"Yes, I have been using myself up rather too freely," he remarked, in answer to my look rather than to my words; "I have been a little pressed of late. ¹⁵Have you any objection to my closing your shutters?"

¹⁶The only light in the room came from the lamp upon the table at which I had been reading. ¹⁷Holmes edged his way round the wall and flinging the shutters together, he bolted them securely.

¹⁸"You are afraid of something?" I asked.

¹⁹"Well, I am."

²⁰"Of what?"

²¹"Of air-guns."

²²"My dear Holmes, what do you mean?"

²³"I think that you know me well enough, Watson, to understand that I am by no means a nervous man.

²⁴At the same time, it is stupidity rather than courage to refuse to recognize danger when it is close upon you. ²⁵Might I trouble you for a match?" ²⁶He drew in the smoke of his cigarette as if the soothing influence was grateful to him.

²⁷"I must apologize for calling so late," said he, "and I must further beg you to be so unconventional as to allow me to leave your house presently by scrambling over your back garden wall."

²⁸“But what does it all mean?” I asked.

²⁹He held out his hand, and I saw in the light of the lamp that two of his knuckles were burst and bleeding.

³⁰“It is not an airy nothing, you see,” said he, smiling. ³¹“On the contrary, it is solid enough for a man to break his hand over. ³²Is Mrs. Watson in?”

³³“She is away upon a visit.”

³⁴“Indeed! ³⁵You are alone?”

³⁶“Quite.”

³⁷“Then it makes it the easier for me to propose that you should come away with me for a week to the Continent.”

³⁸“Where?”

³⁹“Oh, anywhere. ⁴⁰It's all the same to me.”

⁴¹There was something very strange in all this. ⁴²It was not Holmes's nature to take an aimless holiday, and something about his pale, worn face told me that his nerves were at their highest tension. ⁴³He saw the question in my eyes, and, putting his finger-tips together and his elbows upon his knees, he explained the situation.

⁴⁴“You have probably never heard of Professor Moriarty?” said he.

⁴⁵“Never.”

⁴⁶“Aye, there's the genius and the wonder of the thing!” he cried. ⁴⁷“The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. ⁴⁸That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime. ⁴⁹I tell you, Watson, in all seriousness, that if I could beat that man, if I could free society of him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life. ⁵⁰Between ourselves, the recent cases in which I have been of assistance to the royal family of Scandinavia, and to the French republic, have left me in such a position that I could continue to live in the quiet fashion which is most congenial to me, and to concentrate my attention upon my chemical researches. ⁵¹But I could not rest, Watson, I could not sit quiet in my chair, if I thought that such a man as Professor Moriarty were walking the streets of London unchallenged.”

⁵²“What has he done, then?”

⁵³“His career has been an extraordinary one. ⁵⁴He is a man of good birth and excellent education, endowed by nature with a phenomenal mathematical faculty. ⁵⁵At the age of twenty-one he wrote a treatise upon the Binomial Theorem, which has had a European vogue. ⁵⁶On the strength of it he won the Mathematical Chair at one of our smaller universities, and had, to all appearance, a most brilliant career before him. ⁵⁷But the man had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. ⁵⁸A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers. ⁵⁹Dark rumors gathered round him in the university town, and eventually he was compelled to resign his chair and to come down to London, where he set up as an army coach. ⁶⁰So much is known to the world, but what I am telling you now is what I have myself discovered.

⁶¹“As you are aware, Watson, there is no one who knows the higher criminal world of London so well as I do. ⁶²For years past I have continually been conscious of some power behind the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrong-doer. ⁶³Again and again in cases of the most varying sorts—forgery cases, robberies, murders—I have

felt the presence of this force, and I have deduced its action in many of those undiscovered crimes in which I have not been personally consulted. ⁶⁴For years I have endeavored to break through the veil which shrouded it, and at last the time came when I seized my thread and followed it, until it led me, after a thousand cunning windings, to ex-Professor Moriarty of mathematical celebrity.

⁶⁵“He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. ⁶⁶He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. ⁶⁷He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. ⁶⁸He has a brain of the first order. ⁶⁹He sits motionless, like a spider in the center of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. ⁷⁰He does little himself. ⁷¹He only plans. ⁷²But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized. ⁷³Is there a crime to be done, a paper to be abstracted, we will say, a house to be rifled, a man to be removed—the word is passed to the Professor, the matter is organized and carried out. ⁷⁴The agent may be caught. ⁷⁵In that case money is found for his bail or his defence. ⁷⁶But the central power which uses the agent is never caught—never so much as suspected. ⁷⁷This was the organization which I deduced, Watson, and which I devoted my whole energy to exposing and breaking up.

⁷⁸“But the Professor was fenced round with safeguards so cunningly devised that, do what I would, it seemed impossible to get evidence which would convict in a court of law. ⁷⁹You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet at the end of three months I was forced to confess that I had at last met an antagonist who was my intellectual equal. ⁸⁰My horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill. ⁸¹But at last he made a trip—only a little, little trip—but it was more than he could afford when I was so close upon him. ⁸²I had my chance, and, starting from that point, I have woven my net round him until now it is all ready to close. ⁸³In three days—that is to say, on Monday next—matters will be ripe, and the Professor, with all the principal members of his gang, will be in the hands of the police. ⁸⁴Then will come the greatest criminal trial of the century, the clearing up of over forty mysteries, and the rope for all of them; but if we move at all prematurely, you understand, they may slip out of our hands even at the last moment.

⁸⁵“Now, if I could have done this without the knowledge of Professor Moriarty, all would have been well. ⁸⁶But he was too wily for that. ⁸⁷He saw every step which I took to draw my toils round him. ⁸⁸Again and again he strove to break away, but I as often headed him off. ⁸⁹I tell you, my friend, that if a detailed account of that silent contest could be written, it would take its place as the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-parry work in the history of detection. ⁹⁰Never have I risen to such a height, and never have I been so hard pressed by an opponent. ⁹¹He cut deep, and yet I just undercut him. ⁹²This morning the last steps were taken, and three days only were wanted to complete the business. ⁹³I was sitting in my room thinking the matter over, when the door opened and Professor Moriarty stood before me.

⁹⁴“My nerves are fairly proof, Watson, but I must confess to a start when I saw the very man who had been so much in my thoughts standing there on my threshold. ⁹⁵His appearance was quite familiar to me. ⁹⁶He is extremely tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. ⁹⁷He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic-looking, retaining something of the professor in his features. ⁹⁸His shoulders are rounded from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. ⁹⁹He peered at me with great curiosity in his puckered eyes.

¹⁰⁰“‘You have less frontal development than I should have expected,’ said he, at last. ¹⁰¹‘It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one’s dressing-gown.’

¹⁰²“The fact is that upon his entrance I had instantly recognized the extreme personal danger in which I lay. ¹⁰³The only conceivable escape for him lay in silencing my tongue. ¹⁰⁴In an instant I had slipped the revolver from the drawer into my pocket, and was covering him through the cloth. ¹⁰⁵At his remark I drew the weapon out and laid it cocked upon the table. ¹⁰⁶He still smiled and blinked, but there was something about his eyes which made me feel very glad that I had it there.

¹⁰⁷“‘You evidently don't know me,’ said he.

¹⁰⁸“‘On the contrary,’ I answered, ‘I think it is fairly evident that I do. ¹⁰⁹Pray take a chair. ¹¹⁰I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say.’

¹¹¹“‘All that I have to say has already crossed your mind,’ said he.

¹¹²“‘Then possibly my answer has crossed yours,’ I replied.

¹¹³“‘You stand fast?’

¹¹⁴“‘Absolutely.’

¹¹⁵“He clapped his hand into his pocket, and I raised the pistol from the table. ¹¹⁶But he merely drew out a memorandum-book in which he had scribbled some dates.

¹¹⁷“‘You crossed my path on the 4th of January,’ said he. ¹¹⁸‘On the 23d you incommoded me; by the middle of February I was seriously inconvenienced by you; at the end of March I was absolutely hampered in my plans; and now, at the close of April, I find myself placed in such a position through your continual persecution that I am in positive danger of losing my liberty. ¹¹⁹The situation is becoming an impossible one.’

¹²⁰“‘Have you any suggestion to make?’ I asked.

¹²¹“‘You must drop it, Mr. Holmes,’ said he, swaying his face about. ¹²²‘You really must, you know.’

¹²³“‘After Monday,’ said I.

¹²⁴“‘Tut, tut,’ said he. ¹²⁵‘I am quite sure that a man of your intelligence will see that there can be but one outcome to this affair. ¹²⁶It is necessary that you should withdraw. ¹²⁷You have worked things in such a fashion that we have only one resource left. ¹²⁸It has been an intellectual treat to me to see the way in which you have grappled with this affair, and I say, unaffectedly, that it would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure. ¹²⁹You smile, sir, but I assure you that it really would.’

¹³⁰“‘Danger is part of my trade,’ I remarked.

¹³¹“‘That is not danger,’ said he. ¹³²‘It is inevitable destruction. ¹³³You stand in the way not merely of an individual, but of a mighty organization, the full extent of which you, with all your cleverness, have been unable to realize. ¹³⁴You must stand clear, Mr. Holmes, or be trodden under foot.’

¹³⁵“‘I am afraid,’ said I, rising, ‘that in the pleasure of this conversation I am neglecting business of importance which awaits me elsewhere.’

¹³⁶“He rose also and looked at me in silence, shaking his head sadly.

¹³⁷“‘Well, well,’ said he, at last. ¹³⁸‘It seems a pity, but I have done what I could. ¹³⁹I know every move of your game. ¹⁴⁰You can do nothing before Monday. ¹⁴¹It has been a duel between you and me, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁴²You hope to place me in the dock. ¹⁴³I tell you that I will never stand in the dock. ¹⁴⁴You hope to beat me. ¹⁴⁵I tell you that you will never beat me. ¹⁴⁶If you are clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.’

¹⁴⁷“‘You have paid me several compliments, Mr. Moriarty,’ said I. ¹⁴⁸‘Let me pay you one in return when I say that if I were assured of the former eventuality I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter.’

¹⁴⁹“‘I can promise you the one, but not the other,’ he snarled, and so turned his rounded back upon me, and went peering and blinking out of the room.

¹⁵⁰“That was my singular interview with Professor Moriarty. ¹⁵¹I confess that it left an unpleasant effect upon my mind. ¹⁵²His soft, precise fashion of speech leaves a conviction of sincerity which a mere bully could not produce. ¹⁵³Of course, you will say: ‘Why not take police precautions against him?’ the reason is that I am well convinced that it is from his agents the blow would fall. ¹⁵⁴I have the best proofs that it would be so.”

¹⁵⁵“You have already been assaulted?”

¹⁵⁶“My dear Watson, Professor Moriarty is not a man who lets the grass grow under his feet. ¹⁵⁷I went out about mid-day to transact some business in Oxford Street. ¹⁵⁸As I passed the corner which leads from Bentinck Street on to the Welbeck Street crossing a two-horse van furiously driven whizzed round and was on me like a flash. ¹⁵⁹I sprang for the foot-path and saved myself by the fraction of a second. ¹⁶⁰The van dashed round by Marylebone Lane and was gone in an instant. ¹⁶¹I kept to the pavement after that, Watson, but as I walked down Vere Street a brick came down from the roof of one of the houses, and was shattered to fragments at my feet. ¹⁶²I called the police and had the place examined. ¹⁶³There were slates and bricks piled up on the roof preparatory to some repairs, and they would have me believe that the wind had toppled over one of these. ¹⁶⁴Of course I knew better, but I could prove nothing. ¹⁶⁵I took a cab after that and reached my brother's rooms in Pall Mall, where I spent the day. ¹⁶⁶Now I have come round to you, and on my way I was attacked by a rough with a bludgeon. ¹⁶⁷I knocked him down, and the police have him in custody; but I can tell you with the most absolute confidence that no possible connection will ever be traced between the gentleman upon whose front teeth I have barked my knuckles and the retiring mathematical coach, who is, I dare say, working out problems upon a black-board ten miles away. ¹⁶⁸You will not wonder, Watson, that my first act on entering your rooms was to close your shutters, and that I have been compelled to ask your permission to leave the house by some less conspicuous exit than the front door.”

¹⁶⁹I had often admired my friend's courage, but never more than now, as he sat quietly checking off a series of incidents which must have combined to make up a day of horror.

¹⁷⁰“You will spend the night here?” I said.

¹⁷¹“No, my friend, you might find me a dangerous guest. ¹⁷²I have my plans laid, and all will be well. ¹⁷³Matters have gone so far now that they can move without my help as far as the arrest goes, though my presence is necessary for a conviction. ¹⁷⁴It is obvious, therefore, that I cannot do better than get away for the few days which remain before the police are at liberty to act. ¹⁷⁵It would be a great pleasure to me, therefore, if you could come on to the Continent with me.”

¹⁷⁶“The practice is quiet,” said I, “and I have an accommodating neighbor. ¹⁷⁷I should be glad to come.”

¹⁷⁸“And to start to-morrow morning?”

¹⁷⁹“If necessary.”

¹⁸⁰“Oh yes, it is most necessary. ¹⁸¹Then these are your instructions, and I beg, my dear Watson, that you will obey them to the letter, for you are now playing a double-handed game with me against the cleverest rogue and the most powerful syndicate of criminals in Europe. ¹⁸²Now listen! ¹⁸³You will dispatch whatever luggage you intend to take by a trusty messenger unaddressed to Victoria to-night. ¹⁸⁴In the morning you will send for a hansom, desiring your man to take neither the first nor the second which may present itself. ¹⁸⁵Into this hansom you will jump, and you will drive to the Strand end of the Lowther Arcade, handing the address to the cabman upon a slip of paper, with a request that he will not throw it away. ¹⁸⁶Have your fare ready, and the instant that your cab stops, dash through the Arcade, timing yourself to reach the other side at a quarter-past nine. ¹⁸⁷You will find a small brougham waiting close to the curb, driven by a fellow with a heavy black cloak tipped at the collar with red. ¹⁸⁸Into this you will step, and you will reach Victoria in time for the Continental express.”

¹⁸⁹“Where shall I meet you?”

¹⁹⁰“At the station. ¹⁹¹The second first-class carriage from the front will be reserved for us.”

¹⁹²“The carriage is our rendezvous, then?”

¹⁹³“Yes.”

¹⁹⁴It was in vain that I asked Holmes to remain for the evening. ¹⁹⁵It was evident to me that he thought he might bring trouble to the roof he was under, and that that was the motive which impelled him to go.

¹⁹⁶With a few hurried words as to our plans for the morrow he rose and came out with me into the garden, clambering over the wall which leads into Mortimer Street, and immediately whistling for a hansom, in which I heard him drive away.

¹⁹⁷In the morning I obeyed Holmes's injunctions to the letter. ¹⁹⁸A hansom was procured with such precaution as would prevent its being one which was placed ready for us, and I drove immediately after breakfast to the Lowther Arcade, through which I hurried at the top of my speed. ¹⁹⁹A brougham was waiting with a very massive driver wrapped in a dark cloak, who, the instant that I had stepped in, whipped up the horse and rattled off to Victoria Station. ²⁰⁰On my alighting there he turned the carriage, and dashed away again without so much as a look in my direction.

²⁰¹So far all had gone admirably. ²⁰²My luggage was waiting for me, and I had no difficulty in finding the carriage which Holmes had indicated, the less so as it was the only one in the train which was marked “Engaged.” ²⁰³My only source of anxiety now was the non-appearance of Holmes. ²⁰⁴The station clock marked only seven minutes from the time when we were due to start. ²⁰⁵In vain I searched among the groups of travellers and leave-takers for the lithe figure of my friend. ²⁰⁶There was no sign of him. ²⁰⁷I spent a few minutes in assisting a venerable Italian priest, who was endeavoring to make a porter understand, in his broken English, that his luggage was to be booked through to Paris. ²⁰⁸Then, having taken another look round, I returned to my carriage, where I found that the porter, in spite of the ticket, had given me my decrepit Italian friend as a traveling companion. ²⁰⁹It was useless for me to explain to him that his presence was an intrusion, for my Italian was even more limited than his English, so I shrugged my shoulders resignedly, and continued to look out anxiously for my friend. ²¹⁰A chill of fear had come over me, as I thought that his absence might mean that some blow had fallen during the night. ²¹¹Already the doors had all been shut and the whistle blown, when—

²¹²“My dear Watson,” said a voice, “you have not even condescended to say good-morning.”

²¹³I turned in uncontrollable astonishment. ²¹⁴The aged ecclesiastic had turned his face towards me. ²¹⁵For an instant the wrinkles were smoothed away, the nose drew away from the chin, the lower lip ceased to protrude and the mouth to mumble, the dull eyes regained their fire, the drooping figure expanded. ²¹⁶The next the whole frame collapsed again, and Holmes had gone as quickly as he had come.

²¹⁷“Good heavens!” I cried; “how you startled me!”

²¹⁸“Every precaution is still necessary,” he whispered. ²¹⁹“I have reason to think that they are hot upon our trail. ²²⁰Ah, there is Moriarty himself.”

²²¹The train had already begun to move as Holmes spoke. ²²²Glancing back, I saw a tall man pushing his way furiously through the crowd, and waving his hand as if he desired to have the train stopped. ²²³It was too late, however, for we were rapidly gathering momentum, and an instant later had shot clear of the station.

²²⁴“With all our precautions, you see that we have cut it rather fine,” said Holmes, laughing. ²²⁵He rose, and throwing off the black cassock and hat which had formed his disguise, he packed them away in a hand-bag.

226“Have you seen the morning paper, Watson?”

227“No.”

228“You haven't seen about Baker Street, then?”

229“Baker Street?”

230“They set fire to our rooms last night. ²³¹No great harm was done.”

232“Good heavens, Holmes, this is intolerable!”

233“They must have lost my track completely after their bludgeon-man was arrested. ²³⁴Otherwise they could not have imagined that I had returned to my rooms. ²³⁵They have evidently taken the precaution of watching you, however, and that is what has brought Moriarty to Victoria. ²³⁶You could not have made any slip in coming?”

237“I did exactly what you advised.”

238“Did you find your brougham?”

239“Yes, it was waiting.”

240“Did you recognize your coachman?”

241“No.”

242“It was my brother Mycroft. ²⁴³It is an advantage to get about in such a case without taking a mercenary into your confidence. ²⁴⁴But we must plan what we are to do about Moriarty now.”

245“As this is an express, and as the boat runs in connection with it, I should think we have shaken him off very effectively.”

246“My dear Watson, you evidently did not realize my meaning when I said that this man may be taken as being quite on the same intellectual plane as myself. ²⁴⁷You do not imagine that if I were the pursuer I should allow myself to be baffled by so slight an obstacle. ²⁴⁸Why, then, should you think so meanly of him?”

249“What will he do?”

250“What I should do.”

251“What would you do, then?”

252“Engage a special.”

253“But it must be late.”

254“By no means. ²⁵⁵This train stops at Canterbury; and there is always at least a quarter of an hour's delay at the boat. ²⁵⁶He will catch us there.”

257“One would think that we were the criminals. ²⁵⁸Let us have him arrested on his arrival.”

259“It would be to ruin the work of three months. ²⁶⁰We should get the big fish, but the smaller would dart right and left out of the net. ²⁶¹On Monday we should have them all. ²⁶²No, an arrest is inadmissible.”

263“What then?”

264“We shall get out at Canterbury.”

²⁶⁵“And then?”

²⁶⁶“Well, then we must make a cross-country journey to Newhaven, and so over to Dieppe. ²⁶⁷Moriarty will again do what I should do. ²⁶⁸He will get on to Paris, mark down our luggage, and wait for two days at the depot. ²⁶⁹In the meantime we shall treat ourselves to a couple of carpet-bags, encourage the manufactures of the countries through which we travel, and make our way at our leisure into Switzerland, via Luxembourg and Basle.”

²⁶⁷At Canterbury, therefore, we alighted, only to find that we should have to wait an hour before we could get a train to Newhaven.

²⁶⁸I was still looking rather ruefully after the rapidly disappearing luggage-van which contained my wardrobe, when Holmes pulled my sleeve and pointed up the line.

²⁶⁹“Already, you see,” said he.

²⁷⁰Far away, from among the Kentish woods there rose a thin spray of smoke. ²⁷¹A minute later a carriage and engine could be seen flying along the open curve which leads to the station. ²⁷²We had hardly time to take our place behind a pile of luggage when it passed with a rattle and a roar, beating a blast of hot air into our faces.

²⁷³“There he goes,” said Holmes, as we watched the carriage swing and rock over the point. ²⁷⁴“There are limits, you see, to our friend's intelligence. ²⁷⁵It would have been a coup-de-maître had he deduced what I would deduce and acted accordingly.”

²⁷⁶“And what would he have done had he overtaken us?”

²⁷⁷“There cannot be the least doubt that he would have made a murderous attack upon me. ²⁷⁸It is, however, a game at which two may play. ²⁷⁹The question now is whether we should take a premature lunch here, or run our chance of starving before we reach the buffet at Newhaven.”

²⁸⁰We made our way to Brussels that night and spent two days there, moving on upon the third day as far as Strasburg. ²⁸¹On the Monday morning Holmes had telegraphed to the London police, and in the evening we found a reply waiting for us at our hotel. ²⁸²Holmes tore it open, and then with a bitter curse hurled it into the grate.

²⁸³“I might have known it!” he groaned. ²⁸⁴“He has escaped!”

²⁸⁵“Moriarty?”

²⁸⁶“They have secured the whole gang with the exception of him. ²⁸⁷He has given them the slip. ²⁸⁸Of course, when I had left the country there was no one to cope with him. ²⁸⁹But I did think that I had put the game in their hands. ²⁹⁰I think that you had better return to England, Watson.”

²⁹¹“Why?”

²⁹²“Because you will find me a dangerous companion now. ²⁹³This man's occupation is gone. ²⁹⁴He is lost if he returns to London. ²⁹⁵If I read his character right he will devote his whole energies to revenging himself upon me. ²⁹⁶He said as much in our short interview, and I fancy that he meant it. ²⁹⁷I should certainly recommend you to return to your practice.”

²⁹⁸It was hardly an appeal to be successful with one who was an old campaigner as well as an old friend.

²⁹⁹We sat in the Strasbourg *salle-à-manger* arguing the question for half an hour, but the same night we had resumed our journey and were well on our way to Geneva.

³⁰⁰For a charming week we wandered up the Valley of the Rhone, and then, branching off at Leuk, we made our way over the Gemmi Pass, still deep in snow, and so, by way of Interlaken, to Meiringen. ³⁰¹It

was a lovely trip, the dainty green of the spring below, the virgin white of the winter above; but it was clear to me that never for one instant did Holmes forget the shadow which lay across him. ³⁰²In the homely Alpine villages or in the lonely mountain passes, I could tell by his quick glancing eyes and his sharp scrutiny of every face that passed us, that he was well convinced that, walk where we would, we could not walk ourselves clear of the danger which was dogging our footsteps.

³⁰³Once, I remember, as we passed over the Gemmi, and walked along the border of the melancholy Daubensee, a large rock which had been dislodged from the ridge upon our right clattered down and roared into the lake behind us. ³⁰⁴In an instant Holmes had raced up on to the ridge, and, standing upon a lofty pinnacle, craned his neck in every direction. ³⁰⁵It was in vain that our guide assured him that a fall of stones was a common chance in the spring-time at that spot. ³⁰⁶He said nothing, but he smiled at me with the air of a man who sees the fulfillment of that which he had expected.

³⁰⁷And yet for all his watchfulness he was never depressed. ³⁰⁸On the contrary, I can never recollect having seen him in such exuberant spirits. ³⁰⁹Again and again he recurred to the fact that if he could be assured that society was freed from Professor Moriarty he would cheerfully bring his own career to a conclusion.

³¹⁰"I think that I may go so far as to say, Watson, that I have not lived wholly in vain," he remarked. ³¹¹"If my record were closed to-night I could still survey it with equanimity. ³¹²The air of London is the sweeter for my presence. ³¹³In over a thousand cases I am not aware that I have ever used my powers upon the wrong side. ³¹⁴Of late I have been tempted to look into the problems furnished by nature rather than those more superficial ones for which our artificial state of society is responsible. ³¹⁵Your memoirs will draw to an end, Watson, upon the day that I crown my career by the capture or extinction of the most dangerous and capable criminal in Europe."

³¹⁶I shall be brief, and yet exact, in the little which remains for me to tell. ³¹⁷It is not a subject on which I would willingly dwell, and yet I am conscious that a duty devolves upon me to omit no detail.

³¹⁸It was on the third of May that we reached the little village of Meiringen, where we put up at the Englischer Hof, then kept by Peter Steiler the elder. ³¹⁹Our landlord was an intelligent man, and spoke excellent English, having served for three years as waiter at the Grosvenor Hotel in London. ³²⁰At his advice, on the afternoon of the fourth we set off together, with the intention of crossing the hills and spending the night at the hamlet of Rosenlaui. ³²¹We had strict injunctions, however, on no account to pass the falls of Reichenbach, which are about half-way up the hill, without making a small detour to see them.

³²²It is, indeed, a fearful place. ³²³The torrent, swollen by the melting snow, plunges into a tremendous abyss, from which the spray rolls up like the smoke from a burning house. ³²⁴The shaft into which the river hurls itself is an immense chasm, lined by glistening coal-black rock, and narrowing into a creaming, boiling pit of incalculable depth, which brims over and shoots the stream onward over its jagged lip. ³²⁵The long sweep of green water roaring forever down, and the thick flickering curtain of spray hissing forever upward, turn a man giddy with their constant whirl and clamor. ³²⁶We stood near the edge peering down at the gleam of the breaking water far below us against the black rocks, and listening to the half-human shout which came booming up with the spray out of the abyss.

³²⁷The path has been cut half-way round the fall to afford a complete view, but it ends abruptly, and the traveler has to return as he came. ³²⁸We had turned to do so, when we saw a Swiss lad come running along it with a letter in his hand. ³²⁹It bore the mark of the hotel which we had just left, and was addressed to me by the landlord. ³³⁰It appeared that within a very few minutes of our leaving, an English lady had arrived who was in the last stage of consumption. ³³¹She had wintered at Davos Platz, and was journeying now to join her friends at Lucerne, when a sudden hemorrhage had overtaken her. ³³²It was thought that she could hardly live a few hours, but it would be a great consolation to her to see an English doctor, and, if I would only return, etc. ³³³The good Steiler assured me in a postscript that he

would himself look upon my compliance as a very great favor, since the lady absolutely refused to see a Swiss physician, and he could not but feel that he was incurring a great responsibility.

³³⁴The appeal was one which could not be ignored. ³³⁵It was impossible to refuse the request of a fellow-countrywoman dying in a strange land. ³³⁶Yet I had my scruples about leaving Holmes. ³³⁷It was finally agreed, however, that he should retain the young Swiss messenger with him as guide and companion while I returned to Meiringen. ³³⁸My friend would stay some little time at the fall, he said, and would then walk slowly over the hill to Rosenlaui, where I was to rejoin him in the evening. ³³⁹As I turned away I saw Holmes, with his back against a rock and his arms folded, gazing down at the rush of the waters. ³⁴⁰It was the last that I was ever destined to see of him in this world.

³⁴¹When I was near the bottom of the descent I looked back. ³⁴²It was impossible, from that position, to see the fall, but I could see the curving path which winds over the shoulder of the hill and leads to it.

³⁴³Along this a man was, I remember, walking very rapidly.

³⁴⁴I could see his black figure clearly outlined against the green behind him. ³⁴⁵I noted him, and the energy with which he walked but he passed from my mind again as I hurried on upon my errand.

³⁴⁶It may have been a little over an hour before I reached Meiringen. ³⁴⁷Old Steiler was standing at the porch of his hotel.

³⁴⁸“Well,” said I, as I came hurrying up, “I trust that she is no worse?”

³⁴⁹A look of surprise passed over his face, and at the first quiver of his eyebrows my heart turned to lead in my breast.

³⁵⁰“You did not write this?” I said, pulling the letter from my pocket. ³⁵¹“There is no sick Englishwoman in the hotel?”

³⁵²“Certainly not!” he cried. ³⁵³“But it has the hotel mark upon it! ³⁵⁴Ha, it must have been written by that tall Englishman who came in after you had gone. ³⁵⁵He said—”

³⁵⁶But I waited for none of the landlord's explanations. ³⁵⁷In a tingle of fear I was already running down the village street, and making for the path which I had so lately descended. ³⁵⁸It had taken me an hour to come down. ³⁵⁹For all my efforts two more had passed before I found myself at the fall of Reichenbach once more. ³⁶⁰There was Holmes's Alpine-stock still leaning against the rock by which I had left him. ³⁶¹But there was no sign of him, and it was in vain that I shouted. ³⁶²My only answer was my own voice reverberating in a rolling echo from the cliffs around me.

³⁶³It was the sight of that Alpine-stock which turned me cold and sick. ³⁶⁴He had not gone to Rosenlaui, then. ³⁶⁵He had remained on that three-foot path, with sheer wall on one side and sheer drop on the other, until his enemy had overtaken him. ³⁶⁶The young Swiss had gone too. ³⁶⁷He had probably been in the pay of Moriarty, and had left the two men together. ³⁶⁸And then what had happened? ³⁶⁹Who was to tell us what had happened then?

³⁷⁰I stood for a minute or two to collect myself, for I was dazed with the horror of the thing. ³⁷¹Then I began to think of Holmes's own methods and to try to practise them in reading this tragedy. ³⁷²It was, alas, only too easy to do. ³⁷³During our conversation we had not gone to the end of the path, and the Alpine-stock marked the place where we had stood. ³⁷⁴The blackish soil is kept forever soft by the incessant drift of spray, and a bird would leave its tread upon it. ³⁷⁵Two lines of footmarks were clearly marked along the farther end of the path, both leading away from me. ³⁷⁶There were none returning. ³⁷⁷A few yards from the end the soil was all ploughed up into a patch of mud, and the branches and ferns which fringed the chasm were torn and bedraggled. ³⁷⁸I lay upon my face and peered over with the spray spouting up all around me. ³⁷⁹It had darkened since I left, and now I could only see here and there the glistening of moisture upon the black walls, and far away down at the end of the shaft the

gleam of the broken water. ³⁸⁰I shouted; but only the same half-human cry of the fall was borne back to my ears.

³⁸¹But it was destined that I should after all have a last word of greeting from my friend and comrade.

³⁸²I have said that his Alpine-stock had been left leaning against a rock which jutted on to the path.

³⁸³From the top of this boulder the gleam of something bright caught my eye, and, raising my hand, I found that it came from the silver cigarette-case which he used to carry. ³⁸⁴As I took it up a small square of paper upon which it had lain fluttered down on to the ground. ³⁸⁵Unfolding it, I found that it consisted of three pages torn from his note-book and addressed to me. ³⁸⁶It was characteristic of the man that the direction was as precise, and the writing as firm and clear, as though it had been written in his study.

³⁸⁷My dear Watson [it said]:

³⁸⁸I write these few lines through the courtesy of Mr. Moriarty, who awaits my convenience for the final discussion of those questions which lie between us. ³⁸⁹He has been giving me a sketch of the methods by which he avoided the English police and kept himself informed of our movements. ³⁹⁰They certainly confirm the very high opinion which I had formed of his abilities. ³⁹¹I am pleased to think that I shall be able to free society from any further effects of his presence, though I fear that it is at a cost which will give pain to my friends, and especially, my dear Watson, to you. ³⁹²I have already explained to you, however, that my career had in any case reached its crisis, and that no possible conclusion to it could be more congenial to me than this. ³⁹³Indeed, if I may make a full confession to you, I was quite convinced that the letter from Meiringen was a hoax, and I allowed you to depart on that errand under the persuasion that some development of this sort would follow. ³⁹⁴Tell Inspector Patterson that the papers which he needs to convict the gang are in pigeonhole M., done up in a blue envelope and inscribed "Moriarty." ³⁹⁵I made every disposition of my property before leaving England, and handed it to my brother Mycroft. ³⁹⁶Pray give my greetings to Mrs. Watson, and believe me to be, my dear fellow,

³⁹⁷Very sincerely yours,

³⁹⁸Sherlock Holmes

³⁹⁹A few words may suffice to tell the little that remains. ⁴⁰⁰An examination by experts leaves little doubt that a personal contest between the two men ended, as it could hardly fail to end in such a situation, in their reeling over, locked in each other's arms. ⁴⁰¹Any attempt at recovering the bodies was absolutely hopeless, and there, deep down in that dreadful cauldron of swirling water and seething foam, will lie for all time the most dangerous criminal and the foremost champion of the law of their generation. ⁴⁰²The Swiss youth was never found again, and there can be no doubt that he was one of the numerous agents whom Moriarty kept in his employ. ⁴⁰³As to the gang, it will be within the memory of the public how completely the evidence which Holmes had accumulated exposed their organization, and how heavily the hand of the dead man weighed upon them. ⁴⁰⁴Of their terrible chief few details came out during the proceedings, and if I have now been compelled to make a clear statement of his career it is due to those injudicious champions who have endeavored to clear his memory by attacks upon him whom I shall ever regard as the best and the wisest man whom I have ever known.

The Return of Sherlock Holmes

The Adventure of the Empty House

¹It was in the spring of the year 1894 that all London was interested, and the fashionable world dismayed, by the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair under most unusual and inexplicable circumstances. ²The public has already learned those particulars of the crime which came out in the police investigation; but a good deal was suppressed upon that occasion, since the case for the prosecution was so overwhelmingly strong that it was not necessary to bring forward all the facts. ³Only now, at the end of nearly ten years, am I allowed to supply those missing links which make up the whole of that remarkable chain. ⁴The crime was of interest in itself, but that interest was as nothing to me compared to the inconceivable sequel, which afforded me the greatest shock and surprise of any event in my adventurous life. ⁵Even now, after this long interval, I find myself thrilling as I think of it, and feeling once more that sudden flood of joy, amazement, and incredulity which utterly submerged my mind. ⁶Let me say to that public which has shown some interest in those glimpses which I have occasionally given them of the thoughts and actions of a very remarkable man that they are not to blame me if I have not shared my knowledge with them, for I should have considered it my first duty to have done so had I not been barred by a positive prohibition from his own lips, which was only withdrawn upon the third of last month.

⁷It can be imagined that my close intimacy with Sherlock Holmes had interested me deeply in crime, and that after his disappearance I never failed to read with care the various problems which came before the public, and I even attempted more than once for my own private satisfaction to employ his methods in their solution, though with indifferent success. ⁸There was none, however, which appealed to me like this tragedy of Ronald Adair. ⁹As I read the evidence at the inquest, which led up to a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, I realized more clearly than I had ever done the loss which the community had sustained by the death of Sherlock Holmes. ¹⁰There were points about this strange business which would, I was sure, have specially appealed to him, and the efforts of the police would have been supplemented, or more probably anticipated, by the trained observation and the alert mind of the first criminal agent in Europe. ¹¹All day as I drove upon my round I turned over the case in my mind, and found no explanation which appeared to me to be adequate. ¹²At the risk of telling a twice-told tale I will recapitulate the facts as they were known to the public at the conclusion of the inquest.

¹³The Honourable Ronald Adair was the second son of the Earl of Maynooth, at that time Governor of one of the Australian Colonies. ¹⁴Adair's mother had returned from Australia to undergo the operation for cataract, and she, her son Ronald, and her daughter Hilda were living together at 427, Park Lane. ¹⁵The youth moved in the best society, had, so far as was known, no enemies, and no particular vices. ¹⁶He had been engaged to Miss Edith Woodley, of Carstairs, but the engagement had been broken off by mutual consent some months before, and there was no sign that it had left any very profound feeling behind it. ¹⁷For the rest the man's life moved in a narrow and conventional circle, for his habits were quiet and his nature unemotional. ¹⁸Yet it was upon this easy-going young aristocrat that death came in most strange and unexpected form between the hours of ten and eleven-twenty on the night of March 30, 1894.

¹⁹Ronald Adair was fond of cards, playing continually, but never for such stakes as would hurt him. ²⁰He was a member of the Baldwin, the Cavendish, and the Bagatelle card clubs. ²¹It was shown that after dinner on the day of his death he had played a rubber of whist at the latter club. ²²He had also played there in the afternoon. ²³The evidence of those who had played with him—Mr. Murray, Sir John Hardy, and Colonel Moran—showed that the game was whist, and that there was a fairly equal fall of the cards. ²⁴Adair might have lost five pounds, but not more. ²⁵His fortune was a considerable one, and such a loss could not in any way affect him. ²⁶He had played nearly every day at one club or other, but

he was a cautious player, and usually rose a winner. ²⁷It came out in evidence that in partnership with Colonel Moran he had actually won as much as four hundred and twenty pounds in a sitting some weeks before from Godfrey Milner and Lord Balmoral. ²⁸So much for his recent history, as it came out at the inquest.

²⁹On the evening of the crime he returned from the club exactly at ten. ³⁰His mother and sister were out spending the evening with a relation. ³¹The servant deposed that she heard him enter the front room on the second floor, generally used as his sitting-room. ³²She had lit a fire there, and as it smoked she had opened the window. ³³No sound was heard from the room until eleven-twenty, the hour of the return of Lady Maynooth and her daughter. ³⁴Desiring to say good-night, she had attempted to enter her son's room. ³⁵The door was locked on the inside, and no answer could be got to their cries and knocking. ³⁶Help was obtained and the door forced. ³⁷The unfortunate young man was found lying near the table. ³⁸His head had been horribly mutilated by an expanding revolver bullet, but no weapon of any sort was to be found in the room. ³⁹On the table lay two bank-notes for ten pounds each and seventeen pounds ten in silver and gold, the money arranged in little piles of varying amount. ⁴⁰There were some figures also upon a sheet of paper with the names of some club friends opposite to them, from which it was conjectured that before his death he was endeavouring to make out his losses or winnings at cards.

⁴¹A minute examination of the circumstances served only to make the case more complex. ⁴²In the first place, no reason could be given why the young man should have fastened the door upon the inside. ⁴³There was the possibility that the murderer had done this and had afterwards escaped by the window. ⁴⁴The drop was at least twenty feet, however, and a bed of crocuses in full bloom lay beneath. ⁴⁵Neither the flowers nor the earth showed any sign of having been disturbed, nor were there any marks upon the narrow strip of grass which separated the house from the road. ⁴⁶Apparently, therefore, it was the young man himself who had fastened the door. ⁴⁷But how did he come by his death? ⁴⁸No one could have climbed up to the window without leaving traces. ⁴⁹Suppose a man had fired through the window, it would indeed be a remarkable shot who could with a revolver inflict so deadly a wound. ⁵⁰Again, Park Lane is a frequented thoroughfare, and there is a cab-stand within a hundred yards of the house. ⁵¹No one had heard a shot. ⁵²And yet there was the dead man, and there the revolver bullet, which had mushroomed out, as soft-nosed bullets will, and so inflicted a wound which must have caused instantaneous death. ⁵³Such were the circumstances of the Park Lane Mystery, which were further complicated by entire absence of motive, since, as I have said, young Adair was not known to have any enemy, and no attempt had been made to remove the money or valuables in the room.

⁵⁴All day I turned these facts over in my mind, endeavouring to hit upon some theory which could reconcile them all, and to find that line of least resistance which my poor friend had declared to be the starting-point of every investigation. ⁵⁵I confess that I made little progress. ⁵⁶In the evening I strolled across the Park, and found myself about six o'clock at the Oxford Street end of Park Lane. ⁵⁷A group of loafers upon the pavements, all staring up at a particular window, directed me to the house which I had come to see. ⁵⁸A tall, thin man with coloured glasses, whom I strongly suspected of being a plain-clothes detective, was pointing out some theory of his own, while the others crowded round to listen to what he said. I got as near him as I could, but his observations seemed to me to be absurd, so I withdrew again in some disgust. ⁵⁹As I did so I struck against an elderly deformed man, who had been behind me, and I knocked down several books which he was carrying. ⁶⁰I remember that as I picked them up I observed the title of one of them, *The Origin of Tree Worship*, and it struck me that the fellow must be some poor bibliophile who, either as a trade or as a hobby, was a collector of obscure volumes. ⁶¹I endeavoured to apologize for the accident, but it was evident that these books which I had so unfortunately maltreated were very precious objects in the eyes of their owner. ⁶²With a snarl of contempt he turned upon his heel, and I saw his curved back and white side-whiskers disappear among the throng.

⁶³My observations of No. 427, Park Lane did little to clear up the problem in which I was interested.

⁶⁴The house was separated from the street by a low wall and railing, the whole not more than five feet

high. ⁶⁵It was perfectly easy, therefore, for anyone to get into the garden, but the window was entirely inaccessible, since there was no water-pipe or anything which could help the most active man to climb it. ⁶⁶More puzzled than ever I retraced my steps to Kensington. ⁶⁷I had not been in my study five minutes when the maid entered to say that a person desired to see me. ⁶⁸To my astonishment it was none other than my strange old book-collector, his sharp, wizened face peering out from a frame of white hair, and his precious volumes, a dozen of them at least, wedged under his right arm.

⁶⁹“You're surprised to see me, sir,” said he, in a strange, croaking voice.

⁷⁰I acknowledged that I was.

⁷¹“Well, I've a conscience, sir, and when I chanced to see you go into this house, as I came hobbling after you, I thought to myself, I'll just step in and see that kind gentleman, and tell him that if I was a bit gruff in my manner there was not any harm meant, and that I am much obliged to him for picking up my books.”

⁷²“You make too much of a trifle,” said I. ⁷³“May I ask how you knew who I was?”

⁷⁴“Well, sir, if it isn't too great a liberty, I am a neighbour of yours, for you'll find my little bookshop at the corner of Church Street, and very happy to see you, I am sure. ⁷⁵Maybe you collect yourself, sir; here's British Birds, and Catullus, and The Holy War—a bargain every one of them. ⁷⁶With five volumes you could just fill that gap on that second shelf. ⁷⁷It looks untidy, does it not, sir?”

⁷⁸I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. ⁷⁹When I turned again Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across my study table. ⁸⁰I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted for the first and the last time in my life. ⁸¹Certainly a grey mist swirled before my eyes, and when it cleared I found my collar-ends undone and the tingling after-taste of brandy upon my lips. ⁸²Holmes was bending over my chair, his flask in his hand.

⁸³“My dear Watson,” said the well-remembered voice, “I owe you a thousand apologies. ⁸⁴I had no idea that you would be so affected.”

⁸⁵I gripped him by the arm.

⁸⁶“Holmes!” I cried. ⁸⁷“Is it really you? ⁸⁸Can it indeed be that you are alive? ⁸⁹Is it possible that you succeeded in climbing out of that awful abyss?”

⁹⁰“Wait a moment,” said he. ⁹¹“Are you sure that you are really fit to discuss things? ⁹²I have given you a serious shock by my unnecessarily dramatic reappearance.”

⁹³“I am all right, but indeed, Holmes, I can hardly believe my eyes. ⁹⁴Good heavens, to think that you— you of all men—should be standing in my study!” ⁹⁵Again I gripped him by the sleeve and felt the thin, sinewy arm beneath it. ⁹⁶“Well, you're not a spirit, anyhow,” said I. ⁹⁷“My dear chap, I am overjoyed to see you. ⁹⁸Sit down and tell me how you came alive out of that dreadful chasm.”

⁹⁹He sat opposite to me and lit a cigarette in his old nonchalant manner. ¹⁰⁰He was dressed in the seedy frock-coat of the book merchant, but the rest of that individual lay in a pile of white hair and old books upon the table. ¹⁰¹Holmes looked even thinner and keener than of old, but there was a dead-white tinge in his aquiline face which told me that his life recently had not been a healthy one.

¹⁰²“I am glad to stretch myself, Watson,” said he. ¹⁰³“It is no joke when a tall man has to take a foot off his stature for several hours on end. ¹⁰⁴Now, my dear fellow, in the matter of these explanations we have, if I may ask for your co-operation, a hard and dangerous night's work in front of us. ¹⁰⁵Perhaps it would be better if I gave you an account of the whole situation when that work is finished.”

¹⁰⁶“I am full of curiosity. ¹⁰⁷I should much prefer to hear now.”

¹⁰⁸“You'll come with me to-night?”

¹⁰⁹“When you like and where you like.”

¹¹⁰“This is indeed like the old days. ¹¹¹We shall have time for a mouthful of dinner before we need go.

¹¹²Well, then, about that chasm. ¹¹³I had no serious difficulty in getting out of it, for the very simple reason that I never was in it.”

¹¹⁴“You never were in it?”

¹¹⁵“No, Watson, I never was in it. ¹¹⁶My note to you was absolutely genuine. ¹¹⁷I had little doubt that I had come to the end of my career when I perceived the somewhat sinister figure of the late Professor Moriarty standing upon the narrow pathway which led to safety. ¹¹⁸I read an inexorable purpose in his grey eyes. ¹¹⁹I exchanged some remarks with him, therefore, and obtained his courteous permission to write the short note which you afterwards received. ¹²⁰I left it with my cigarette-box and my stick and I walked along the pathway, Moriarty still at my heels. ¹²¹When I reached the end I stood at bay. ¹²²He drew no weapon, but he rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. ¹²³He knew that his own game was up, and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me. ¹²⁴We tottered together upon the brink of the fall. ¹²⁵I have some knowledge, however, of baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling, which has more than once been very useful to me. ¹²⁶I slipped through his grip, and he with a horrible scream kicked madly for a few seconds and clawed the air with both his hands. ¹²⁷But for all his efforts he could not get his balance, and over he went. ¹²⁸With my face over the brink I saw him fall for a long way. ¹²⁹Then he struck a rock, bounded off, and splashed into the water.”

¹³⁰I listened with amazement to this explanation, which Holmes delivered between the puffs of his cigarette.

¹³¹“But the tracks!” I cried. ¹³²“I saw with my own eyes that two went down the path and none returned.”

¹³³“It came about in this way. ¹³⁴The instant that the Professor had disappeared it struck me what a really extraordinarily lucky chance Fate had placed in my way. ¹³⁵I knew that Moriarty was not the only man who had sworn my death. ¹³⁶There were at least three others whose desire for vengeance upon me would only be increased by the death of their leader. ¹³⁷They were all most dangerous men. ¹³⁸One or other would certainly get me. ¹³⁹On the other hand, if all the world was convinced that I was dead they would take liberties, these men, they would lay themselves open, and sooner or later I could destroy them. ¹⁴⁰Then it would be time for me to announce that I was still in the land of the living. ¹⁴¹So rapidly does the brain act that I believe I had thought this all out before Professor Moriarty had reached the bottom of the Reichenbach Fall.

¹⁴²“I stood up and examined the rocky wall behind me. ¹⁴³In your picturesque account of the matter, which I read with great interest some months later, you assert that the wall was sheer. ¹⁴⁴This was not literally true. ¹⁴⁵A few small footholds presented themselves, and there was some indication of a ledge. ¹⁴⁶The cliff is so high that to climb it all was an obvious impossibility, and it was equally impossible to make my way along the wet path without leaving some tracks. ¹⁴⁷I might, it is true, have reversed my boots, as I have done on similar occasions, but the sight of three sets of tracks in one direction would certainly have suggested a deception. ¹⁴⁸On the whole, then, it was best that I should risk the climb. ¹⁴⁹It was not a pleasant business, Watson. ¹⁵⁰The fall roared beneath me. ¹⁵¹I am not a fanciful person, but I give you my word that I seemed to hear Moriarty's voice screaming at me out of the abyss. ¹⁵²A mistake would have been fatal. ¹⁵³More than once, as tufts of grass came out in my hand or my foot slipped in the wet notches of the rock, I thought that I was gone. ¹⁵⁴But I struggled upwards, and at last I reached a ledge several feet deep and covered with soft green moss, where I could lie unseen in the most perfect

comfort. ¹⁵⁵There I was stretched when you, my dear Watson, and all your following were investigating in the most sympathetic and inefficient manner the circumstances of my death.

¹⁵⁶“At last, when you had all formed your inevitable and totally erroneous conclusions, you departed for the hotel and I was left alone. ¹⁵⁷I had imagined that I had reached the end of my adventures, but a very unexpected occurrence showed me that there were surprises still in store for me. ¹⁵⁸A huge rock, falling from above, boomed past me, struck the path, and bounded over into the chasm. ¹⁵⁹For an instant I thought that it was an accident; but a moment later, looking up, I saw a man's head against the darkening sky, and another stone struck the very ledge upon which I was stretched, within a foot of my head. ¹⁶⁰Of course, the meaning of this was obvious. ¹⁶¹Moriarty had not been alone. ¹⁶²A confederate—and even that one glance had told me how dangerous a man that confederate was—had kept guard while the Professor had attacked me. ¹⁶³From a distance, unseen by me, he had been a witness of his friend's death and of my escape. ¹⁶⁴He had waited, and then, making his way round to the top of the cliff, he had endeavoured to succeed where his comrade had failed.

¹⁶⁵“I did not take long to think about it, Watson. ¹⁶⁶Again I saw that grim face look over the cliff, and I knew that it was the precursor of another stone. ¹⁶⁷I scrambled down on to the path. ¹⁶⁸I don't think I could have done it in cold blood. ¹⁶⁹It was a hundred times more difficult than getting up. ¹⁷⁰But I had no time to think of the danger, for another stone sang past me as I hung by my hands from the edge of the ledge. ¹⁷¹Halfway down I slipped, but by the blessing of God I landed, torn and bleeding, upon the path. ¹⁷²I took to my heels, did ten miles over the mountains in the darkness, and a week later I found myself in Florence with the certainty that no one in the world knew what had become of me.

¹⁷³“I had only one confidant—my brother Mycroft. ¹⁷⁴I owe you many apologies, my dear Watson, but it was all-important that it should be thought I was dead, and it is quite certain that you would not have written so convincing an account of my unhappy end had you not yourself thought that it was true. ¹⁷⁵Several times during the last three years I have taken up my pen to write to you, but always I feared lest your affectionate regard for me should tempt you to some indiscretion which would betray my secret. ¹⁷⁶For that reason I turned away from you this evening when you upset my books, for I was in danger at the time, and any show of surprise and emotion upon your part might have drawn attention to my identity and led to the most deplorable and irreparable results. ¹⁷⁷As to Mycroft, I had to confide in him in order to obtain the money which I needed. ¹⁷⁸The course of events in London did not run so well as I had hoped, for the trial of the Moriarty gang left two of its most dangerous members, my own most vindictive enemies, at liberty. ¹⁷⁹I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa and spending some days with the head Llama. ¹⁸⁰You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend. ¹⁸¹I then passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum, the results of which I have communicated to the Foreign Office. ¹⁸²Returning to France I spent some months in a research into the coal-tar derivatives, which I conducted in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the South of France. ¹⁸³Having concluded this to my satisfaction, and learning that only one of my enemies was now left in London, I was about to return when my movements were hastened by the news of this very remarkable Park Lane Mystery, which not only appealed to me by its own merits, but which seemed to offer some most peculiar personal opportunities. ¹⁸⁴I came over at once to London, called in my own person at Baker Street, threw Mrs. Hudson into violent hysterics, and found that Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they had always been. ¹⁸⁵So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock to-day I found myself in my old arm-chair in my own old room, and only wishing that I could have seen my old friend Watson in the other chair which he has so often adorned.”

¹⁸⁶Such was the remarkable narrative to which I listened on that April evening—a narrative which would have been utterly incredible to me had it not been confirmed by the actual sight of the tall, spare figure and the keen, eager face, which I had never thought to see again. ¹⁸⁷In some manner he had learned of

my own sad bereavement, and his sympathy was shown in his manner rather than in his words. ¹⁸⁸“Work is the best antidote to sorrow, my dear Watson,” said he, “and I have a piece of work for us both to-night which, if we can bring it to a successful conclusion, will in itself justify a man's life on this planet.”

¹⁸⁹In vain I begged him to tell me more. ¹⁹⁰“You will hear and see enough before morning,” he answered.

¹⁹¹“We have three years of the past to discuss. ¹⁹²Let that suffice until half-past nine, when we start upon the notable adventure of the empty house.”

¹⁹³It was indeed like old times when, at that hour, I found myself seated beside him in a hansom, my revolver in my pocket and the thrill of adventure in my heart. ¹⁹⁴Holmes was cold and stern and silent.

¹⁹⁵As the gleam of the street-lamps flashed upon his austere features I saw that his brows were drawn down in thought and his thin lips compressed. ¹⁹⁶I knew not what wild beast we were about to hunt down in the dark jungle of criminal London, but I was well assured from the bearing of this master huntsman that the adventure was a most grave one, while the sardonic smile which occasionally broke through his ascetic gloom boded little good for the object of our quest.

¹⁹⁷I had imagined that we were bound for Baker Street, but Holmes stopped the cab at the corner of Cavendish Square. ¹⁹⁸I observed that as he stepped out he gave a most searching glance to right and left, and at every subsequent street corner he took the utmost pains to assure that he was not followed. ¹⁹⁹Our route was certainly a singular one. ²⁰⁰Holmes's knowledge of the byways of London was extraordinary, and on this occasion he passed rapidly, and with an assured step, through a network of mews and stables the very existence of which I had never known. ²⁰¹We emerged at last into a small road, lined with old, gloomy houses, which led us into Manchester Street, and so to Blandford Street. ²⁰²Here he turned swiftly down a narrow passage, passed through a wooden gate into a deserted yard, and then opened with a key the back door of a house. ²⁰³We entered together and he closed it behind us.

²⁰⁴The place was pitch-dark, but it was evident to me that it was an empty house. ²⁰⁵Our feet creaked and crackled over the bare planking, and my outstretched hand touched a wall from which the paper was hanging in ribbons. ²⁰⁶Holmes's cold, thin fingers closed round my wrist and led me forwards down a long hall, until I dimly saw the murky fanlight over the door. ²⁰⁷Here Holmes turned suddenly to the right, and we found ourselves in a large, square, empty room, heavily shadowed in the corners, but faintly lit in the centre from the lights of the street beyond. ²⁰⁸There was no lamp near and the window was thick with dust, so that we could only just discern each other's figures within. ²⁰⁹My companion put his hand upon my shoulder and his lips close to my ear.

²¹⁰“Do you know where we are?” he whispered.

²¹¹“Surely that is Baker Street,” I answered, staring through the dim window.

²¹²“Exactly. ²¹³We are in Camden House, which stands opposite to our own old quarters.”

²¹⁴“But why are we here?”

²¹⁵“Because it commands so excellent a view of that picturesque pile. ²¹⁶Might I trouble you, my dear Watson, to draw a little nearer to the window, taking every precaution not to show yourself, and then to look up at our old rooms—the starting-point of so many of our little adventures? ²¹⁷We will see if my three years of absence have entirely taken away my power to surprise you.”

²¹⁸I crept forward and looked across at the familiar window. ²¹⁹As my eyes fell upon it I gave a gasp and a cry of amazement. ²²⁰The blind was down and a strong light was burning in the room. ²²¹The shadow of a man who was seated in a chair within was thrown in hard, black outline upon the luminous screen of the window. ²²²There was no mistaking the poise of the head, the squareness of the shoulders, the sharpness of the features. ²²³The face was turned half-round, and the effect was that of one of those black silhouettes which our grandparents loved to frame. ²²⁴It was a perfect reproduction of Holmes.

²²⁵So amazed was I that I threw out my hand to make sure that the man himself was standing beside me.

²²⁶He was quivering with silent laughter.

²²⁷“Well?” said he.

²²⁸“Good heavens!” I cried. ²²⁹“It is marvellous.”

²³⁰“I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety,” said he, and I recognised in his voice the joy and pride which the artist takes in his own creation. ²³¹“It really is rather like me, is it not?”

²³²“I should be prepared to swear that it was you.”

²³³“The credit of the execution is due to Monsieur Oscar Meunier, of Grenoble, who spent some days in doing the moulding. ²³⁴It is a bust in wax. ²³⁵The rest I arranged myself during my visit to Baker Street this afternoon.”

²³⁶“But why?”

²³⁷“Because, my dear Watson, I had the strongest possible reason for wishing certain people to think that I was there when I was really elsewhere.”

²³⁸“And you thought the rooms were watched?”

²³⁹“I knew that they were watched.”

²⁴⁰“By whom?”

²⁴¹“By my old enemies, Watson. ²⁴²By the charming society whose leader lies in the Reichenbach Fall. ²⁴³You must remember that they knew, and only they knew, that I was still alive. ²⁴⁴Sooner or later they believed that I should come back to my rooms. ²⁴⁵They watched them continuously, and this morning they saw me arrive.”

²⁴⁶“How do you know?”

²⁴⁷“Because I recognised their sentinel when I glanced out of my window. ²⁴⁸He is a harmless enough fellow, Parker by name, a garroter by trade, and a remarkable performer upon the Jew's harp. ²⁴⁹I cared nothing for him. ²⁵⁰But I cared a great deal for the much more formidable person who was behind him, the bosom friend of Moriarty, the man who dropped the rocks over the cliff, the most cunning and dangerous criminal in London. ²⁵¹That is the man who is after me to-night, Watson, and that is the man who is quite unaware that we are after him.”

²⁵²My friend's plans were gradually revealing themselves. ²⁵³From this convenient retreat the watchers were being watched and the trackers tracked. ²⁵⁴That angular shadow up yonder was the bait and we were the hunters. ²⁵⁵In silence we stood together in the darkness and watched the hurrying figures who passed and repassed in front of us. ²⁵⁶Holmes was silent and motionless; but I could tell that he was keenly alert, and that his eyes were fixed intently upon the stream of passers-by. ²⁵⁷It was a bleak and boisterous night, and the wind whistled shrilly down the long street. ²⁵⁸Many people were moving to and fro, most of them muffled in their coats and cravats. ²⁵⁹Once or twice it seemed to me that I had seen the same figure before, and I especially noticed two men who appeared to be sheltering themselves from the wind in the doorway of a house some distance up the street. ²⁶⁰I tried to draw my companion's attention to them, but he gave a little ejaculation of impatience and continued to stare into the street. ²⁶¹More than once he fidgeted with his feet and tapped rapidly with his fingers upon the wall. ²⁶²It was evident to me that he was becoming uneasy and that his plans were not working out altogether as he had hoped. ²⁶³At last, as midnight approached and the street gradually cleared, he paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. ²⁶⁴I was about to make some remark to him when I raised my eyes

to the lighted window and again experienced almost as great a surprise as before. ²⁶⁵I clutched Holmes's arm and pointed upwards.

²⁶⁶"The shadow has moved!" I cried.

²⁶⁷It was, indeed, no longer the profile, but the back, which was turned towards us.

²⁶⁸Three years had certainly not smoothed the asperities of his temper or his impatience with a less active intelligence than his own.

²⁶⁹"Of course it has moved," said he. ²⁷⁰"Am I such a farcical bungler, Watson, that I should erect an obvious dummy and expect that some of the sharpest men in Europe would be deceived by it? ²⁷¹We have been in this room two hours, and Mrs. Hudson has made some change in that figure eight times, or once in every quarter of an hour. ²⁷²She works it from the front so that her shadow may never be seen. ²⁷³Ah!" ²⁷⁴He drew in his breath with a shrill, excited intake. In the dim light I saw his head thrown forward, his whole attitude rigid with attention. ²⁷⁵Outside, the street was absolutely deserted. ²⁷⁶Those two men might still be crouching in the doorway, but I could no longer see them. ²⁷⁷All was still and dark, save only that brilliant yellow screen in front of us with the black figure outlined upon its centre. ²⁷⁸Again in the utter silence I heard that thin, sibilant note which spoke of intense suppressed excitement. ²⁷⁹An instant later he pulled me back into the blackest corner of the room, and I felt his warning hand upon my lips. ²⁸⁰The fingers which clutched me were quivering. ²⁸¹Never had I known my friend more moved, and yet the dark street still stretched lonely and motionless before us.

²⁸²But suddenly I was aware of that which his keener senses had already distinguished. ²⁸³A low, stealthy sound came to my ears, not from the direction of Baker Street, but from the back of the very house in which we lay concealed. ²⁸⁴A door opened and shut. ²⁸⁵An instant later steps crept down the passage—steps which were meant to be silent, but which reverberated harshly through the empty house. ²⁸⁶Holmes crouched back against the wall and I did the same, my hand closing upon the handle of my revolver. ²⁸⁷Peering through the gloom, I saw the vague outline of a man, a shade blacker than the blackness of the open door. ²⁸⁸He stood for an instant, and then he crept forward, crouching, menacing, into the room. ²⁸⁹He was within three yards of us, this sinister figure, and I had braced myself to meet his spring, before I realized that he had no idea of our presence. ²⁹⁰He passed close beside us, stole over to the window, and very softly and noiselessly raised it for half a foot. ²⁹¹As he sank to the level of this opening the light of the street, no longer dimmed by the dusty glass, fell full upon his face. ²⁹²The man seemed to be beside himself with excitement. ²⁹³His two eyes shone like stars and his features were working convulsively. ²⁹⁴He was an elderly man, with a thin, projecting nose, a high, bald forehead, and a huge grizzled moustache. ²⁹⁵An opera-hat was pushed to the back of his head, and an evening dress shirt-front gleamed out through his open overcoat. ²⁹⁶His face was gaunt and swarthy, scored with deep, savage lines. ²⁹⁷In his hand he carried what appeared to be a stick, but as he laid it down upon the floor it gave a metallic clang. ²⁹⁸Then from the pocket of his overcoat he drew a bulky object, and he busied himself in some task which ended with a loud, sharp click, as if a spring or bolt had fallen into its place. ²⁹⁹Still kneeling upon the floor he bent forward and threw all his weight and strength upon some lever, with the result that there came a long, whirling, grinding noise, ending once more in a powerful click. ³⁰⁰He straightened himself then, and I saw that what he held in his hand was a sort of gun, with a curiously misshapen butt. ³⁰¹He opened it at the breech, put something in, and snapped the breech-block. ³⁰²Then, crouching down, he rested the end of the barrel upon the ledge of the open window, and I saw his long moustache droop over the stock and his eye gleam as it peered along the sights. ³⁰³I heard a little sigh of satisfaction as he cuddled the butt into his shoulder, and saw that amazing target, the black man on the yellow ground, standing clear at the end of his fore sight. ³⁰⁴For an instant he was rigid and motionless. ³⁰⁵Then his finger tightened on the trigger. ³⁰⁶There was a strange, loud whiz and a long, silvery tinkle of broken glass. ³⁰⁷At that instant Holmes sprang like a tiger on to the marksman's back and hurled him flat upon his face. ³⁰⁸He was up again in a moment, and with convulsive strength he seized Holmes by the throat; but I struck him on the head with the butt of my revolver and he dropped

again upon the floor. ³⁰⁹I fell upon him, and as I held him my comrade blew a shrill call upon a whistle. ³¹⁰There was the clatter of running feet upon the pavement, and two policemen in uniform, with one plain-clothes detective, rushed through the front entrance and into the room.

³¹¹“That you, Lestrade?” said Holmes.

³¹²“Yes, Mr. Holmes. ³¹³I took the job myself. ³¹⁴It's good to see you back in London, sir.”

³¹⁵“I think you want a little unofficial help. ³¹⁶Three undetected murders in one year won't do, Lestrade. ³¹⁷But you handled the Molesey Mystery with less than your usual—that's to say, you handled it fairly well.”

³¹⁸We had all risen to our feet, our prisoner breathing hard, with a stalwart constable on each side of him. ³¹⁹Already a few loiterers had begun to collect in the street. ³²⁰Holmes stepped up to the window, closed it, and dropped the blinds. ³²¹Lestrade had produced two candles and the policemen had uncovered their lanterns. ³²²I was able at last to have a good look at our prisoner.

³²³It was a tremendously virile and yet sinister face which was turned towards us. ³²⁴With the brow of a philosopher above and the jaw of a sensualist below, the man must have started with great capacities for good or for evil. ³²⁵But one could not look upon his cruel blue eyes, with their drooping, cynical lids, or upon the fierce, aggressive nose and the threatening, deep-lined brow, without reading Nature's plainest danger-signals. ³²⁶He took no heed of any of us, but his eyes were fixed upon Holmes's face with an expression in which hatred and amazement were equally blended. ³²⁷“You fiend!” he kept on muttering. ³²⁸“You clever, clever fiend!”

³²⁹“Ah, Colonel!” said Holmes, arranging his rumpled collar; “‘journeys end in lovers' meetings,’ as the old play says. ³³⁰I don't think I have had the pleasure of seeing you since you favoured me with those attentions as I lay on the ledge above the Reichenbach Fall.”

³³¹The Colonel still stared at my friend like a man in a trance. ³³²“You cunning, cunning fiend!” was all that he could say.

³³³“I have not introduced you yet,” said Holmes. ³³⁴“This, gentlemen, is Colonel Sebastian Moran, once of Her Majesty's Indian Army, and the best heavy game shot that our Eastern Empire has ever produced. ³³⁵I believe I am correct, Colonel, in saying that your bag of tigers still remains unrivalled?”

³³⁶The fierce old man said nothing, but still glared at my companion; with his savage eyes and bristling moustache he was wonderfully like a tiger himself.

³³⁷“I wonder that my very simple stratagem could deceive so old a shikari,” said Holmes. ³³⁸“It must be very familiar to you. ³³⁹Have you not tethered a young kid under a tree, lain above it with your rifle, and waited for the bait to bring up your tiger? ³⁴⁰This empty house is my tree and you are my tiger. ³⁴¹You have possibly had other guns in reserve in case there should be several tigers, or in the unlikely supposition of your own aim failing you. ³⁴²These,” he pointed around, “are my other guns. ³⁴³The parallel is exact.”

³⁴⁴Colonel Moran sprang forward, with a snarl of rage, but the constables dragged him back. ³⁴⁵The fury upon his face was terrible to look at.

³⁴⁶“I confess that you had one small surprise for me,” said Holmes. ³⁴⁷“I did not anticipate that you would yourself make use of this empty house and this convenient front window. ³⁴⁸I had imagined you as operating from the street, where my friend Lestrade and his merry men were awaiting you. ³⁴⁹With that exception all has gone as I expected.”

³⁵⁰Colonel Moran turned to the official detective.

³⁵¹“You may or may not have just cause for arresting me,” said he, “but at least there can be no reason why I should submit to the gibes of this person. ³⁵²If I am in the hands of the law let things be done in a legal way.”

³⁵³“Well, that's reasonable enough,” said Lestrade. ³⁵⁴“Nothing further you have to say, Mr. Holmes, before we go?”

³⁵⁵Holmes had picked up the powerful air-gun from the floor and was examining its mechanism.

³⁵⁶“An admirable and unique weapon,” said he, “noiseless and of tremendous power. ³⁵⁷I knew Von Herder, the blind German mechanic, who constructed it to the order of the late Professor Moriarty. ³⁵⁸For years I have been aware of its existence, though I have never before had the opportunity of handling it. ³⁵⁹I commend it very specially to your attention, Lestrade, and also the bullets which fit it.”

³⁶⁰“You can trust us to look after that, Mr. Holmes,” said Lestrade, as the whole party moved towards the door. ³⁶¹“Anything further to say?”

³⁶²“Only to ask what charge you intend to prefer?”

³⁶³“What charge, sir? ³⁶⁴Why, of course, the attempted murder of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

³⁶⁵“Not so, Lestrade. ³⁶⁶I do not propose to appear in the matter at all. ³⁶⁷To you, and to you only, belongs the credit of the remarkable arrest which you have effected. ³⁶⁸Yes, Lestrade, I congratulate you! ³⁶⁹With your usual happy mixture of cunning and audacity you have got him.”

³⁷⁰“Got him! ³⁷¹Got whom, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁷²“The man that the whole force has been seeking in vain—Colonel Sebastian Moran, who shot the Honourable Ronald Adair with an expanding bullet from an air-gun through the open window of the second-floor front of No. 427, Park Lane, upon the 30th of last month. ³⁷³That's the charge, Lestrade. ³⁷⁴And now, Watson, if you can endure the draught from a broken window, I think that half an hour in my study over a cigar may afford you some profitable amusement.”

³⁷⁵Our old chambers had been left unchanged through the supervision of Mycroft Holmes and the immediate care of Mrs. Hudson. ³⁷⁶As I entered I saw, it is true, an unwonted tidiness, but the old landmarks were all in their place. ³⁷⁷There were the chemical corner and the acid-stained, deal-topped table. ³⁷⁸There upon a shelf was the row of formidable scrap-books and books of reference which many of our fellow-citizens would have been so glad to burn. ³⁷⁹The diagrams, the violin-case, and the pipe-rack—even the Persian slipper which contained the tobacco—all met my eyes as I glanced round me. ³⁸⁰There were two occupants of the room—one Mrs. Hudson, who beamed upon us both as we entered; the other the strange dummy which had played so important a part in the evening's adventures. ³⁸¹It was a wax-coloured model of my friend, so admirably done that it was a perfect facsimile. ³⁸²It stood on a small pedestal table with an old dressing-gown of Holmes's so draped round it that the illusion from the street was absolutely perfect.

³⁸³“I hope you preserved all precautions, Mrs. Hudson?” said Holmes.

³⁸⁴“I went to it on my knees, sir, just as you told me.”

³⁸⁵“Excellent. ³⁸⁶You carried the thing out very well. ³⁸⁷Did you observe where the bullet went?”

³⁸⁸“Yes, sir. ³⁸⁹I'm afraid it has spoilt your beautiful bust, for it passed right through the head and flattened itself on the wall. ³⁹⁰I picked it up from the carpet. ³⁹¹Here it is!”

³⁹²Holmes held it out to me. ³⁹³“A soft revolver bullet, as you perceive, Watson. ³⁹⁴There's genius in that, for who would expect to find such a thing fired from an air-gun. ³⁹⁵All right, Mrs. Hudson, I am

much obliged for your assistance. ³⁹⁶And now, Watson, let me see you in your old seat once more, for there are several points which I should like to discuss with you.”

³⁹⁷He had thrown off the seedy frock-coat, and now he was the Holmes of old in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown which he took from his effigy.

³⁹⁸“The old shikari's nerves have not lost their steadiness nor his eyes their keenness,” said he, with a laugh, as he inspected the shattered forehead of his bust.

³⁹⁹“Plumb in the middle of the back of the head and smack through the brain. ⁴⁰⁰He was the best shot in India, and I expect that there are few better in London. ⁴⁰¹Have you heard the name?”

⁴⁰²“No, I have not.”

⁴⁰³“Well, well, such is fame! ⁴⁰⁴But, then, if I remember aright, you had not heard the name of Professor James Moriarty, who had one of the great brains of the century. ⁴⁰⁵Just give me down my index of biographies from the shelf.”

⁴⁰⁶He turned over the pages lazily, leaning back in his chair and blowing great clouds from his cigar.

⁴⁰⁷“My collection of M's is a fine one,” said he. ⁴⁰⁸“Moriarty himself is enough to make any letter illustrious, and here is Morgan the poisoner, and Merridew of abominable memory, and Mathews, who knocked out my left canine in the waiting-room at Charing Cross, and, finally, here is our friend of to-night.”

⁴⁰⁹He handed over the book, and I read:

⁴¹⁰Moran, Sebastian, Colonel. ⁴¹¹Unemployed. ⁴¹²Formerly 1st Bangalore Pioneers. ⁴¹³Born London, 1840. ⁴¹⁴Son of Sir Augustus Moran, C.B., once British Minister to Persia. ⁴¹⁵Educated Eton and Oxford. ⁴¹⁶Served in Jowaki Campaign, Afghan Campaign, Charasiab (despatches), Sherpur, and Cabul. ⁴¹⁷Author of Heavy Game of the Western Himalayas, 1881; Three Months in the Jungle, 1884. ⁴¹⁸Address: Conduit Street. ⁴¹⁹Clubs: The Anglo-Indian, the Tankerville, the Bagatelle Card Club.

⁴²⁰On the margin was written, in Holmes's precise hand:

⁴²¹The second most dangerous man in London.

⁴²²“This is astonishing,” said I, as I handed back the volume. ⁴²³“The man's career is that of an honourable soldier.”

⁴²⁴“It is true,” Holmes answered. ⁴²⁵“Up to a certain point he did well. ⁴²⁶He was always a man of iron nerve, and the story is still told in India how he crawled down a drain after a wounded man-eating tiger. ⁴²⁷There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. ⁴²⁸You will see it often in humans. ⁴²⁹I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strong influence which came into the line of his pedigree. ⁴³⁰The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family.”

⁴³¹“It is surely rather fanciful.”

⁴³²“Well, I don't insist upon it. ⁴³³Whatever the cause, Colonel Moran began to go wrong. ⁴³⁴Without any open scandal he still made India too hot to hold him. ⁴³⁵He retired, came to London, and again acquired an evil name. ⁴³⁶It was at this time that he was sought out by Professor Moriarty, to whom for a time he was chief of the staff. ⁴³⁷Moriarty supplied him liberally with money and used him only in one or two very high-class jobs which no ordinary criminal could have undertaken. ⁴³⁸You may have some recollection of the death of Mrs. Stewart, of Lauder, in 1887. ⁴³⁹Not? ⁴⁴⁰Well, I am sure Moran was at the bottom of it; but nothing could be proved. ⁴⁴¹So cleverly was the Colonel concealed that even

when the Moriarty gang was broken up we could not incriminate him. ⁴⁴²You remember at that date, when I called upon you in your rooms, how I put up the shutters for fear of air-guns? ⁴⁴³No doubt you thought me fanciful. ⁴⁴⁴I knew exactly what I was doing, for I knew of the existence of this remarkable gun, and I knew also that one of the best shots in the world would be behind it. ⁴⁴⁵When we were in Switzerland he followed us with Moriarty, and it was undoubtedly he who gave me that evil five minutes on the Reichenbach ledge.

⁴⁴⁶“You may think that I read the papers with some attention during my sojourn in France, on the look-out for any chance of laying him by the heels. ⁴⁴⁷So long as he was free in London my life would really not have been worth living. ⁴⁴⁸Night and day the shadow would have been over me, and sooner or later his chance must have come. ⁴⁴⁹What could I do? ⁴⁵⁰I could not shoot him at sight, or I should myself be in the dock. ⁴⁵¹There was no use appealing to a magistrate. ⁴⁵²They cannot interfere on the strength of what would appear to them to be a wild suspicion. ⁴⁵³So I could do nothing. ⁴⁵⁴But I watched the criminal news, knowing that sooner or later I should get him. ⁴⁵⁵Then came the death of this Ronald Adair. ⁴⁵⁶My chance had come at last! ⁴⁵⁷Knowing what I did, was it not certain that Colonel Moran had done it? ⁴⁵⁸He had played cards with the lad; he had followed him home from the club; he had shot him through the open window. ⁴⁵⁹There was not a doubt of it. ⁴⁶⁰The bullets alone are enough to put his head in a noose. ⁴⁶¹I came over at once. ⁴⁶²I was seen by the sentinel, who would, I knew, direct the Colonel's attention to my presence. ⁴⁶³He could not fail to connect my sudden return with his crime and to be terribly alarmed. ⁴⁶⁴I was sure that he would make an attempt to get me out of the way at once, and would bring round his murderous weapon for that purpose. ⁴⁶⁵I left him an excellent mark in the window, and, having warned the police that they might be needed—by the way, Watson, you spotted their presence in that doorway with unerring accuracy—I took up what seemed to me to be a judicious post for observation, never dreaming that he would choose the same spot for his attack. ⁴⁶⁶Now, my dear Watson, does anything remain for me to explain?”

⁴⁶⁷“Yes,” said I. ⁴⁶⁸“You have not made it clear what was Colonel Moran's motive in murdering the Honourable Ronald Adair.”

⁴⁶⁹“Ah! my dear Watson, there we come into those realms of conjecture where the most logical mind may be at fault. ⁴⁷⁰Each may form his own hypothesis upon the present evidence, and yours is as likely to be correct as mine.”

⁴⁷¹“You have formed one, then?”

⁴⁷²“I think that it is not difficult to explain the facts. ⁴⁷³It came out in evidence that Colonel Moran and young Adair had between them won a considerable amount of money. ⁴⁷⁴Now, Moran undoubtedly played foul—of that I have long been aware. ⁴⁷⁵I believe that on the day of the murder Adair had discovered that Moran was cheating. ⁴⁷⁶Very likely he had spoken to him privately, and had threatened to expose him unless he voluntarily resigned his membership of the club and promised not to play cards again. ⁴⁷⁷It is unlikely that a youngster like Adair would at once make a hideous scandal by exposing a well-known man so much older than himself. ⁴⁷⁸Probably he acted as I suggest. ⁴⁷⁹The exclusion from his clubs would mean ruin to Moran, who lived by his ill-gotten card gains. ⁴⁸⁰He therefore murdered Adair, who at the time was endeavouring to work out how much money he should himself return, since he could not profit by his partner's foul play. ⁴⁸¹He locked the door lest the ladies should surprise him and insist upon knowing what he was doing with these names and coins. ⁴⁸²Will it pass?”

⁴⁸³“I have no doubt that you have hit upon the truth.”

⁴⁸⁴“It will be verified or disproved at the trial. Meanwhile, come what may, Colonel Moran will trouble us no more, the famous air-gun of Von Herder will embellish the Scotland Yard Museum, and once again Mr. Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents.”

The Adventure of the Norwood Builder

¹“From the point of view of the criminal expert,” said Mr. Sherlock Holmes, “London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty.”

²“I can hardly think that you would find many decent citizens to agree with you,” I answered.

³“Well, well, I must not be selfish,” said he, with a smile, as he pushed back his chair from the breakfast-table. ⁴“The community is certainly the gainer, and no one the loser, save the poor out-of-work specialist, whose occupation has gone. ⁵With that man in the field one's morning paper presented infinite possibilities. ⁶Often it was only the smallest trace, Watson, the faintest indication, and yet it was enough to tell me that the great malignant brain was there, as the gentlest tremors of the edges of the web remind one of the foul spider which lurks in the centre. ⁷Petty thefts, wanton assaults, purposeless outrage—to the man who held the clue all could be worked into one connected whole. ⁸To the scientific student of the higher criminal world no capital in Europe offered the advantages which London then possessed. ⁹But now—” ¹⁰He shrugged his shoulders in humorous deprecation of the state of things which he had himself done so much to produce.

¹¹At the time of which I speak Holmes had been back for some months, and I, at his request, had sold my practice and returned to share the old quarters in Baker Street. ¹²A young doctor, named Verner, had purchased my small Kensington practice, and given with astonishingly little demur the highest price that I ventured to ask—an incident which only explained itself some years later when I found that Verner was a distant relation of Holmes's, and that it was my friend who had really found the money.

¹³Our months of partnership had not been so uneventful as he had stated, for I find, on looking over my notes, that this period includes the case of the papers of Ex-President Murillo, and also the shocking affair of the Dutch steamship Friesland, which so nearly cost us both our lives. ¹⁴His cold and proud nature was always averse, however, to anything in the shape of public applause, and he bound me in the most stringent terms to say no further word of himself, his methods, or his successes—a prohibition which, as I have explained, has only now been removed.

¹⁵Mr. Sherlock Holmes was leaning back in his chair after his whimsical protest, and was unfolding his morning paper in a leisurely fashion, when our attention was arrested by a tremendous ring at the bell, followed immediately by a hollow drumming sound, as if someone were beating on the outer door with his fist. ¹⁶As it opened there came a tumultuous rush into the hall, rapid feet clattered up the stair, and an instant later a wild-eyed and frantic young man, pale, dishevelled, and palpitating, burst into the room. ¹⁷He looked from one to the other of us, and under our gaze of inquiry he became conscious that some apology was needed for this unceremonious entry.

¹⁸“I'm sorry, Mr. Holmes,” he cried. ¹⁹“You mustn't blame me. I am nearly mad. ²⁰Mr. Holmes, I am the unhappy John Hector McFarlane.”

²¹He made the announcement as if the name alone would explain both his visit and its manner; but I could see by my companion's unresponsive face that it meant no more to him than to me.

²²“Have a cigarette, Mr. McFarlane,” said he, pushing his case across. ²³“I am sure that with your symptoms my friend Dr. Watson here would prescribe a sedative. ²⁴The weather has been so very warm these last few days. ²⁵Now, if you feel a little more composed, I should be glad if you would sit down in that chair and tell us very slowly and quietly who you are and what it is that you want. ²⁶You mentioned your name as if I should recognise it, but I assure you that, beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you.”

²⁷Familiar as I was with my friend's methods, it was not difficult for me to follow his deductions, and to observe the untidiness of attire, the sheaf of legal papers, the watch-charm, and the breathing which had prompted them. ²⁸Our client, however, stared in amazement.

²⁹"Yes, I am all that, Mr. Holmes, and in addition I am the most unfortunate man at this moment in London. ³⁰For Heaven's sake don't abandon me, Mr. Holmes! ³¹If they come to arrest me before I have finished my story, make them give me time so that I may tell you the whole truth. ³²I could go to jail happy if I knew that you were working for me outside."

³³"Arrest you!" said Holmes. ³⁴"This is really most grati—most interesting. ³⁵On what charge do you expect to be arrested?"

³⁶"Upon the charge of murdering Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood."

³⁷My companion's expressive face showed a sympathy which was not, I am afraid, entirely unmixed with satisfaction.

³⁸"Dear me," said he; "it was only this moment at breakfast that I was saying to my friend, Dr. Watson, that sensational cases had disappeared out of our papers."

³⁹Our visitor stretched forward a quivering hand and picked up the Daily Telegraph, which still lay upon Holmes's knee.

⁴⁰"If you had looked at it, sir, you would have seen at a glance what the errand is on which I have come to you this morning. ⁴¹I feel as if my name and my misfortune must be in every man's mouth." ⁴²He turned it over to expose the central page. ⁴³"Here it is, and with your permission I will read it to you. ⁴⁴Listen to this, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁵The head-lines are: 'Mysterious Affair at Lower Norwood. ⁴⁶Disappearance of a Well-known Builder. ⁴⁷Suspicion of Murder and Arson. ⁴⁸A Clue to the Criminal.' ⁴⁹That is the clue which they are already following, Mr. Holmes, and I know that it leads infallibly to me. ⁵⁰I have been followed from London Bridge Station, and I am sure that they are only waiting for the warrant to arrest me. ⁵¹It will break my mother's heart—it will break her heart!" ⁵²He wrung his hands in an agony of apprehension, and swayed backwards and forwards in his chair.

⁵³I looked with interest upon this man, who was accused of being the perpetrator of a crime of violence. ⁵⁴He was flaxen-haired and handsome in a washed-out negative fashion, with frightened blue eyes and a clean-shaven face, with a weak, sensitive mouth. ⁵⁵His age may have been about twenty-seven; his dress and bearing that of a gentleman. ⁵⁶From the pocket of his light summer overcoat protruded the bundle of endorsed papers which proclaimed his profession.

⁵⁷"We must use what time we have," said Holmes. ⁵⁸"Watson, would you have the kindness to take the paper and to read me the paragraph in question?"

⁵⁹Underneath the vigorous head-lines which our client had quoted I read the following suggestive narrative:—

⁶⁰"Late last night, or early this morning, an incident occurred at Lower Norwood which points, it is feared, to a serious crime. ⁶¹Mr. Jonas Oldacre is a well-known resident of that suburb, where he has carried on his business as a builder for many years. ⁶²Mr. Oldacre is a bachelor, fifty-two years of age, and lives in Deep Dene House, at the Sydenham end of the road of that name. ⁶³He has had the reputation of being a man of eccentric habits, secretive and retiring. ⁶⁴For some years he has practically withdrawn from the business, in which he is said to have amassed considerable wealth. ⁶⁵A small timber-yard still exists, however, at the back of the house, and last night, about twelve o'clock, an alarm was given that one of the stacks was on fire. ⁶⁶The engines were soon upon the spot, but the dry wood burned with great fury, and it was impossible to arrest the conflagration until the stack had been entirely consumed. ⁶⁷Up to this point the incident bore the appearance of an ordinary accident, but fresh indications seem

to point to serious crime. ⁶⁸Surprise was expressed at the absence of the master of the establishment from the scene of the fire, and an inquiry followed, which showed that he had disappeared from the house. ⁶⁹An examination of his room revealed that the bed had not been slept in, that a safe which stood in it was open, that a number of important papers were scattered about the room, and, finally, that there were signs of a murderous struggle, slight traces of blood being found within the room, and an oaken walking-stick, which also showed stains of blood upon the handle. ⁷⁰It is known that Mr. Jonas Oldacre had received a late visitor in his bedroom upon that night, and the stick found has been identified as the property of this person, who is a young London solicitor named John Hector McFarlane, junior partner of Graham and McFarlane, of 426, Gresham Buildings, E.C. ⁷¹The police believe that they have evidence in their possession which supplies a very convincing motive for the crime, and altogether it cannot be doubted that sensational developments will follow.

⁷²“Later.—It is rumoured as we go to press that Mr. John Hector McFarlane has actually been arrested on the charge of the murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. ⁷³It is at least certain that a warrant has been issued. ⁷⁴There have been further and sinister developments in the investigation at Norwood. Besides the signs of a struggle in the room of the unfortunate builder it is now known that the French windows of his bedroom (which is on the ground floor) were found to be open, that there were marks as if some bulky object had been dragged across to the wood-pile, and, finally, it is asserted that charred remains have been found among the charcoal ashes of the fire. ⁷⁵The police theory is that a most sensational crime has been committed, that the victim was clubbed to death in his own bedroom, his papers rifled, and his dead body dragged across to the wood-stack, which was then ignited so as to hide all traces of the crime. ⁷⁶The conduct of the criminal investigation has been left in the experienced hands of Inspector Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, who is following up the clues with his accustomed energy and sagacity.”

⁷⁷Sherlock Holmes listened with closed eyes and finger-tips together to this remarkable account.

⁷⁸“The case has certainly some points of interest,” said he, in his languid fashion. ⁷⁹“May I ask, in the first place, Mr. McFarlane, how it is that you are still at liberty, since there appears to be enough evidence to justify your arrest?”

⁸⁰“I live at Torrington Lodge, Blackheath, with my parents, Mr. Holmes; but last night, having to do business very late with Mr. Jonas Oldacre, I stayed at an hotel in Norwood, and came to my business from there. ⁸¹I knew nothing of this affair until I was in the train, when I read what you have just heard. ⁸²I at once saw the horrible danger of my position, and I hurried to put the case into your hands. ⁸³I have no doubt that I should have been arrested either at my City office or at my home. ⁸⁴A man followed me from London Bridge Station, and I have no doubt— ⁸⁵Great Heaven, what is that?”

⁸⁶It was a clang of the bell, followed instantly by heavy steps upon the stair. ⁸⁷A moment later our old friend Lestrade appeared in the doorway. ⁸⁸Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of one or two uniformed policemen outside.

⁸⁹“Mr. John Hector McFarlane?” said Lestrade.

⁹⁰Our unfortunate client rose with a ghastly face.

⁹¹“I arrest you for the wilful murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood.”

⁹²McFarlane turned to us with a gesture of despair, and sank into his chair once more like one who is crushed.

⁹³“One moment, Lestrade,” said Holmes. ⁹⁴“Half an hour more or less can make no difference to you, and the gentleman was about to give us an account of this very interesting affair, which might aid us in clearing it up.”

⁹⁵“I think there will be no difficulty in clearing it up,” said Lestrade, grimly.

⁹⁶“None the less, with your permission, I should be much interested to hear his account.”

⁹⁷“Well, Mr. Holmes, it is difficult for me to refuse you anything, for you have been of use to the force once or twice in the past, and we owe you a good turn at Scotland Yard,” said Lestrade. ⁹⁸“At the same time I must remain with my prisoner, and I am bound to warn him that anything he may say will appear in evidence against him.”

⁹⁹“I wish nothing better,” said our client. ¹⁰⁰“All I ask is that you should hear and recognise the absolute truth.”

¹⁰¹Lestrade looked at his watch. ¹⁰²“I’ll give you half an hour,” said he.

¹⁰³“I must explain first,” said McFarlane, “that I knew nothing of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. ¹⁰⁴His name was familiar to me, for many years ago my parents were acquainted with him, but they drifted apart. ¹⁰⁵I was very much surprised, therefore, when yesterday, about three o’clock in the afternoon, he walked into my office in the City. ¹⁰⁶But I was still more astonished when he told me the object of his visit. ¹⁰⁷He had in his hand several sheets of a note-book, covered with scribbled writing—here they are—and he laid them on my table.

¹⁰⁸“‘Here is my will,’ said he. ¹⁰⁹‘I want you, Mr. McFarlane, to cast it into proper legal shape. ¹¹⁰I will sit here while you do so.’

¹¹¹“I set myself to copy it, and you can imagine my astonishment when I found that, with some reservations, he had left all his property to me. ¹¹²He was a strange little, ferret-like man, with white eyelashes, and when I looked up at him I found his keen grey eyes fixed upon me with an amused expression. ¹¹³I could hardly believe my own senses as I read the terms of the will; but he explained that he was a bachelor with hardly any living relation, that he had known my parents in his youth, and that he had always heard of me as a very deserving young man, and was assured that his money would be in worthy hands. ¹¹⁴Of course, I could only stammer out my thanks. ¹¹⁵The will was duly finished, signed, and witnessed by my clerk. ¹¹⁶This is it on the blue paper, and these slips, as I have explained, are the rough draft. ¹¹⁷Mr. Jonas Oldacre then informed me that there were a number of documents—building leases, title-deeds, mortgages, scrip, and so forth—which it was necessary that I should see and understand. ¹¹⁸He said that his mind would not be easy until the whole thing was settled, and he begged me to come out to his house at Norwood that night, bringing the will with me, and to arrange matters. ¹¹⁹‘Remember, my boy, not one word to your parents about the affair until everything is settled. ¹²⁰We will keep it as a little surprise for them.’ ¹²¹He was very insistent upon this point, and made me promise it faithfully.

¹²²“You can imagine, Mr. Holmes, that I was not in a humour to refuse him anything that he might ask. ¹²³He was my benefactor, and all my desire was to carry out his wishes in every particular. ¹²⁴I sent a telegram home, therefore, to say that I had important business on hand, and that it was impossible for me to say how late I might be. ¹²⁵Mr. Oldacre had told me that he would like me to have supper with him at nine, as he might not be home before that hour. ¹²⁶I had some difficulty in finding his house, however, and it was nearly half-past before I reached it. ¹²⁷I found him—”

¹²⁸“One moment!” said Holmes. ¹²⁹“Who opened the door?”

¹³⁰“A middle-aged woman, who was, I suppose, his housekeeper.”

¹³¹“And it was she, I presume, who mentioned your name?”

¹³²“Exactly,” said McFarlane.

¹³³“Pray proceed.”

¹³⁴McFarlane wiped his damp brow and then continued his narrative:—

¹³⁵“I was shown by this woman into a sitting-room, where a frugal supper was laid out. ¹³⁶Afterwards Mr. Jonas Oldacre led me into his bedroom, in which there stood a heavy safe. ¹³⁷This he opened and took out a mass of documents, which we went over together. ¹³⁸It was between eleven and twelve when we finished. ¹³⁹He remarked that we must not disturb the housekeeper. ¹⁴⁰He showed me out through his own French window, which had been open all this time.”

¹⁴¹“Was the blind down?” asked Holmes.

¹⁴²“I will not be sure, but I believe that it was only half down. ¹⁴³Yes, I remember how he pulled it up in order to swing open the window. ¹⁴⁴I could not find my stick, and he said, ‘Never mind, my boy; I shall see a good deal of you now, I hope, and I will keep your stick until you come back to claim it.’ ¹⁴⁵I left him there, the safe open, and the papers made up in packets upon the table. ¹⁴⁶It was so late that I could not get back to Blackheath, so I spent the night at the Anerley Arms, and I knew nothing more until I read of this horrible affair in the morning.”

¹⁴⁷“Anything more that you would like to ask, Mr. Holmes?” said Lestrade, whose eyebrows had gone up once or twice during this remarkable explanation.

¹⁴⁸“Not until I have been to Blackheath.”

¹⁴⁹“You mean to Norwood,” said Lestrade.

¹⁵⁰“Oh, yes; no doubt that is what I must have meant,” said Holmes, with his enigmatical smile.

¹⁵¹Lestrade had learned by more experiences than he would care to acknowledge that that razor-like brain could cut through that which was impenetrable to him. ¹⁵²I saw him look curiously at my companion.

¹⁵³“I think I should like to have a word with you presently, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said he. ¹⁵⁴“Now, Mr. McFarlane, two of my constables are at the door and there is a four-wheeler waiting.” ¹⁵⁵The wretched young man arose, and with a last beseeching glance at us walked from the room. ¹⁵⁶The officers conducted him to the cab, but Lestrade remained.

¹⁵⁷Holmes had picked up the pages which formed the rough draft of the will, and was looking at them with the keenest interest upon his face.

¹⁵⁸“There are some points about that document, Lestrade, are there not?” said he, pushing them over.

¹⁵⁹The official looked at them with a puzzled expression.

¹⁶⁰“I can read the first few lines, and these in the middle of the second page, and one or two at the end.

¹⁶¹Those are as clear as print,” said he; “but the writing in between is very bad, and there are three places where I cannot read it at all.”

¹⁶²“What do you make of that?” said Holmes.

¹⁶³“Well, what do you make of it?”

¹⁶⁴“That it was written in a train; the good writing represents stations, the bad writing movement, and the very bad writing passing over points. ¹⁶⁵A scientific expert would pronounce at once that this was drawn up on a suburban line, since nowhere save in the immediate vicinity of a great city could there be so quick a succession of points. ¹⁶⁶Granting that his whole journey was occupied in drawing up the will, then the train was an express, only stopping once between Norwood and London Bridge.”

¹⁶⁷Lestrade began to laugh.

¹⁶⁸“You are too many for me when you begin to get on your theories, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ¹⁶⁹“How does this bear on the case?”

¹⁷⁰“Well, it corroborates the young man's story to the extent that the will was drawn up by Jonas Oldacre in his journey yesterday. ¹⁷¹It is curious—is it not?—that a man should draw up so important a document in so haphazard a fashion. ¹⁷²It suggests that he did not think it was going to be of much practical importance. ¹⁷³If a man drew up a will which he did not intend ever to be effective he might do it so.”

¹⁷⁴“Well, he drew up his own death-warrant at the same time,” said Lestrade.

¹⁷⁵“Oh, you think so?”

¹⁷⁶“Don't you?”

¹⁷⁷“Well, it is quite possible; but the case is not clear to me yet.”

¹⁷⁸“Not clear? ¹⁷⁹Well, if that isn't clear, what could be clear? ¹⁸⁰Here is a young man who learns suddenly that if a certain older man dies he will succeed to a fortune. ¹⁸¹What does he do? ¹⁸²He says nothing to anyone, but he arranges that he shall go out on some pretext to see his client that night; he waits until the only other person in the house is in bed, and then in the solitude of a man's room he murders him, burns his body in the wood-pile, and departs to a neighbouring hotel. ¹⁸³The blood-stains in the room and also on the stick are very slight. ¹⁸⁴It is probable that he imagined his crime to be a bloodless one, and hoped that if the body were consumed it would hide all traces of the method of his death—traces which for some reason must have pointed to him. ¹⁸⁵Is all this not obvious?”

¹⁸⁶“It strikes me, my good Lestrade, as being just a trifle too obvious,” said Holmes. ¹⁸⁷“You do not add imagination to your other great qualities; but if you could for one moment put yourself in the place of this young man, would you choose the very night after the will had been made to commit your crime? ¹⁸⁸Would it not seem dangerous to you to make so very close a relation between the two incidents? ¹⁸⁹Again, would you choose an occasion when you are known to be in the house, when a servant has let you in? ¹⁹⁰And, finally, would you take the great pains to conceal the body and yet leave your own stick as a sign that you were the criminal? ¹⁹¹Confess, Lestrade, that all this is very unlikely.”

¹⁹²“As to the stick, Mr. Holmes, you know as well as I do that a criminal is often flurried and does things which a cool man would avoid. ¹⁹³He was very likely afraid to go back to the room. ¹⁹⁴Give me another theory that would fit the facts.”

¹⁹⁵“I could very easily give you half-a-dozen,” said Holmes. ¹⁹⁶“Here, for example, is a very possible and even probable one. ¹⁹⁷I make you a free present of it. ¹⁹⁸The older man is showing documents which are of evident value. ¹⁹⁹A passing tramp sees them through the window, the blind of which is only half down. ²⁰⁰Exit the solicitor. ²⁰¹Enter the tramp! ²⁰²He seizes a stick, which he observes there, kills Oldacre, and departs after burning the body.”

²⁰³“Why should the tramp burn the body?”

²⁰⁴“For the matter of that why should McFarlane?”

²⁰⁵“To hide some evidence.”

²⁰⁶“Possibly the tramp wanted to hide that any murder at all had been committed.”

²⁰⁷“And why did the tramp take nothing?”

²⁰⁸“Because they were papers that he could not negotiate.”

²⁰⁹Lestrade shook his head, though it seemed to me that his manner was less absolutely assured than before.

²¹⁰“Well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you may look for your tramp, and while you are finding him we will hold on to our man. ²¹¹The future will show which is right. ²¹²Just notice this point, Mr. Holmes: that so

far as we know none of the papers were removed, and that the prisoner is the one man in the world who had no reason for removing them, since he was heir-at-law and would come into them in any case."

²¹³My friend seemed struck by this remark.

²¹⁴"I don't mean to deny that the evidence is in some ways very strongly in favour of your theory," said he. ²¹⁵"I only wish to point out that there are other theories possible. ²¹⁶As you say, the future will decide.

²¹⁷Good morning! ²¹⁸I dare say that in the course of the day I shall drop in at Norwood and see how you are getting on."

²¹⁹When the detective departed my friend rose and made his preparations for the day's work with the alert air of a man who has a congenial task before him.

²²⁰"My first movement, Watson," said he, as he bustled into his frock-coat, "must, as I said, be in the direction of Blackheath."

²²¹"And why not Norwood?"

²²²"Because we have in this case one singular incident coming close to the heels of another singular incident. ²²³The police are making the mistake of concentrating their attention upon the second, because it happens to be the one which is actually criminal. ²²⁴But it is evident to me that the logical way to approach the case is to begin by trying to throw some light upon the first incident—the curious will, so suddenly made, and to so unexpected an heir. ²²⁵It may do something to simplify what followed. ²²⁶No, my dear fellow, I don't think you can help me. ²²⁷There is no prospect of danger, or I should not dream of stirring out without you. ²²⁸I trust that when I see you in the evening I will be able to report that I have been able to do something for this unfortunate youngster who has thrown himself upon my protection."

²²⁹It was late when my friend returned, and I could see by a glance at his haggard and anxious face that the high hopes with which he had started had not been fulfilled. ²³⁰For an hour he droned away upon his violin, endeavouring to soothe his own ruffled spirits. ²³¹At last he flung down the instrument and plunged into a detailed account of his misadventures.

²³²"It's all going wrong, Watson—all as wrong as it can go. ²³³I kept a bold face before Lestrade, but, upon my soul, I believe that for once the fellow is on the right track and we are on the wrong. ²³⁴All my instincts are one way and all the facts are the other, and I much fear that British juries have not yet attained that pitch of intelligence when they will give the preference to my theories over Lestrade's facts."

²³⁵"Did you go to Blackheath?"

²³⁶"Yes, Watson, I went there, and I found very quickly that the late lamented Oldacre was a pretty considerable black-guard. ²³⁷The father was away in search of his son. ²³⁸The mother was at home—a little, fluffy, blue-eyed person, in a tremor of fear and indignation. ²³⁹Of course, she would not admit even the possibility of his guilt. ²⁴⁰But she would not express either surprise or regret over the fate of Oldacre. ²⁴¹On the contrary, she spoke of him with such bitterness that she was unconsciously considerably strengthening the case of the police, for, of course, if her son had heard her speak of the man in this fashion it would predispose him towards hatred and violence. ²⁴²'He was more like a malignant and cunning ape than a human being,' said she, 'and he always was, ever since he was a young man.'

²⁴³"'You knew him at that time?' said I.

²⁴⁴"'Yes, I knew him well; in fact, he was an old suitor of mine. ²⁴⁵Thank Heaven that I had the sense to turn away from him and to marry a better, if a poorer, man. ²⁴⁶I was engaged to him, Mr. Holmes, when I heard a shocking story of how he had turned a cat loose in an aviary, and I was so horrified at

his brutal cruelty that I would have nothing more to do with him.’ ²⁴⁷She rummaged in a bureau, and presently she produced a photograph of a woman, shamefully defaced and mutilated with a knife. ²⁴⁸‘That is my own photograph,’ she said. ²⁴⁹‘He sent it to me in that state, with his curse, upon my wedding morning.’

²⁵⁰‘‘Well,’ said I, ‘at least he has forgiven you now, since he has left all his property to your son.’

²⁵¹‘‘Neither my son nor I want anything from Jonas Oldacre, dead or alive,’ she cried, with a proper spirit. ²⁵²‘There is a God in Heaven, Mr. Holmes, and that same God who has punished that wicked man will show in His own good time that my son's hands are guiltless of his blood.’

²⁵³‘‘Well, I tried one or two leads, but could get at nothing which would help our hypothesis, and several points which would make against it. ²⁵⁴I gave it up at last and off I went to Norwood.

²⁵⁵‘‘This place, Deep Dene House, is a big modern villa of staring brick, standing back in its own grounds, with a laurel-clumped lawn in front of it. ²⁵⁶To the right and some distance back from the road was the timber-yard which had been the scene of the fire. ²⁵⁷Here's a rough plan on a leaf of my note-book. ²⁵⁸This window on the left is the one which opens into Oldacre's room. ²⁵⁹You can look into it from the road, you see. ²⁶⁰That is about the only bit of consolation I have had to-day. ²⁶¹Lestrade was not there, but his head constable did the honours. ²⁶²They had just made a great treasure-trove. ²⁶³They had spent the morning raking among the ashes of the burned wood-pile, and besides the charred organic remains they had secured several discoloured metal discs. ²⁶⁴I examined them with care, and there was no doubt that they were trouser buttons. ²⁶⁵I even distinguished that one of them was marked with the name of ‘Hyams,’ who was Oldacre's tailor. ²⁶⁶I then worked the lawn very carefully for signs and traces, but this drought has made everything as hard as iron. ²⁶⁷Nothing was to be seen save that some body or bundle had been dragged through a low privet hedge which is in a line with the wood-pile. ²⁶⁸All that, of course, fits in with the official theory. ²⁶⁹I crawled about the lawn with an August sun on my back, but I got up at the end of an hour no wiser than before.

²⁷⁰‘‘Well, after this fiasco I went into the bedroom and examined that also. ²⁷¹The blood-stains were very slight, mere smears and discolorations, but undoubtedly fresh. ²⁷²The stick had been removed, but there also the marks were slight. ²⁷³There is no doubt about the stick belonging to our client. ²⁷⁴He admits it. ²⁷⁵Footmarks of both men could be made out on the carpet, but none of any third person, which again is a trick for the other side. ²⁷⁶They were piling up their score all the time and we were at a standstill.

²⁷⁷‘‘Only one little gleam of hope did I get—and yet it amounted to nothing. ²⁷⁸I examined the contents of the safe, most of which had been taken out and left on the table. ²⁷⁹The papers had been made up into sealed envelopes, one or two of which had been opened by the police. ²⁸⁰They were not, so far as I could judge, of any great value, nor did the bank-book show that Mr. Oldacre was in such very affluent circumstances. ²⁸¹But it seemed to me that all the papers were not there. ²⁸²There were allusions to some deeds—possibly the more valuable—which I could not find. ²⁸³This, of course, if we could definitely prove it, would turn Lestrade's argument against himself, for who would steal a thing if he knew that he would shortly inherit it?

²⁸⁴‘‘Finally, having drawn every other cover and picked up no scent, I tried my luck with the housekeeper. ²⁸⁵Mrs. Lexington is her name, a little, dark, silent person, with suspicious and sidelong eyes. ²⁸⁶She could tell us something if she would—I am convinced of it. ²⁸⁷But she was as close as wax. ²⁸⁸Yes, she had let Mr. McFarlane in at half-past nine. ²⁸⁹She wished her hand had withered before she had done so. ²⁹⁰She had gone to bed at half-past ten. ²⁹¹Her room was at the other end of the house, and she could hear nothing of what passed. ²⁹²Mr. McFarlane had left his hat, and to the best of her belief his stick, in the hall. ²⁹³She had been awakened by the alarm of fire. ²⁹⁴Her poor, dear master had certainly been murdered. ²⁹⁵Had he any enemies? ²⁹⁶Well, every man had enemies, but Mr. Oldacre kept himself very much to himself, and only met people in the way of business. ²⁹⁷She had seen the buttons, and was sure that they belonged to the clothes which he had worn last night. ²⁹⁸The wood-pile was very

dry, for it had not rained for a month. ²⁹⁹It burned like tinder, and by the time she reached the spot nothing could be seen but flames. ³⁰⁰She and all the firemen smelled the burned flesh from inside it. ³⁰¹She knew nothing of the papers, nor of Mr. Oldacre's private affairs.

³⁰²“So, my dear Watson, there's my report of a failure. ³⁰³And yet—and yet—”—he clenched his thin hands in a paroxysm of conviction—“I know it's all wrong. ³⁰⁴I feel it in my bones. ³⁰⁵There is something that has not come out, and that housekeeper knows it. ³⁰⁶There was a sort of sulky defiance in her eyes, which only goes with guilty knowledge. ³⁰⁷However, there's no good talking any more about it, Watson; but unless some lucky chance comes our way I fear that the Norwood Disappearance Case will not figure in that chronicle of our successes which I foresee that a patient public will sooner or later have to endure.”

³⁰⁸“Surely,” said I, “the man's appearance would go far with any jury?”

³⁰⁹“That is a dangerous argument, my dear Watson. ³¹⁰You remember that terrible murderer, Bert Stevens, who wanted us to get him off in '87? ³¹¹Was there ever a more mild-mannered, Sunday-school young man?”

³¹²“It is true.”

³¹³“Unless we succeed in establishing an alternative theory this man is lost. ³¹⁴You can hardly find a flaw in the case which can now be presented against him, and all further investigation has served to strengthen it. ³¹⁵By the way, there is one curious little point about those papers which may serve us as the starting-point for an inquiry. ³¹⁶On looking over the bank-book I found that the low state of the balance was principally due to large cheques which have been made out during the last year to Mr. Cornelius. ³¹⁷I confess that I should be interested to know who this Mr. Cornelius may be with whom a retired builder has such very large transactions. ³¹⁸Is it possible that he has had a hand in the affair? ³¹⁹Cornelius might be a broker, but we have found no scrip to correspond with these large payments. ³²⁰Failing any other indication my researches must now take the direction of an inquiry at the bank for the gentleman who has cashed these cheques. ³²¹But I fear, my dear fellow, that our case will end ingloriously by Lestrade hanging our client, which will certainly be a triumph for Scotland Yard.”

³²²I do not know how far Sherlock Holmes took any sleep that night, but when I came down to breakfast I found him pale and harassed, his bright eyes the brighter for the dark shadows round them. ³²³The carpet round his chair was littered with cigarette-ends and with the early editions of the morning papers. ³²⁴An open telegram lay upon the table.

³²⁵“What do you think of this, Watson?” he asked, tossing it across.

³²⁶It was from Norwood, and ran as follows:

³²⁷“Important fresh evidence to hand. ³²⁸McFarlane's guilt definitely established. ³²⁹Advise you to abandon case.

³³⁰— Lestrade.

³³¹“This sounds serious,” said I.

³³²“It is Lestrade's little cock-a-doodle of victory,” Holmes answered, with a bitter smile. ³³³“And yet it may be premature to abandon the case. ³³⁴After all, important fresh evidence is a two-edged thing, and may possibly cut in a very different direction to that which Lestrade imagines. ³³⁵Take your breakfast, Watson, and we will go out together and see what we can do. ³³⁶I feel as if I shall need your company and your moral support to-day.”

³³⁷My friend had no breakfast himself, for it was one of his peculiarities that in his more intense moments he would permit himself no food, and I have known him presume upon his iron strength until

he has fainted from pure inanition. ³³⁸“At present I cannot spare energy and nerve force for digestion,” he would say in answer to my medical remonstrances. ³³⁹I was not surprised, therefore, when this morning he left his untouched meal behind him and started with me for Norwood. ³⁴⁰A crowd of morbid sightseers were still gathered round Deep Dene House, which was just such a suburban villa as I had pictured. ³⁴¹Within the gates Lestrade met us, his face flushed with victory, his manner grossly triumphant.

³⁴²“Well, Mr. Holmes, have you proved us to be wrong yet? ³⁴³Have you found your tramp?” he cried.

³⁴⁴“I have formed no conclusion whatever,” my companion answered.

³⁴⁵“But we formed ours yesterday, and now it proves to be correct; so you must acknowledge that we have been a little in front of you this time, Mr. Holmes.”

³⁴⁶“You certainly have the air of something unusual having occurred,” said Holmes.

³⁴⁷Lestrade laughed loudly.

³⁴⁸“You don't like being beaten any more than the rest of us do,” said he. ³⁴⁹“A man can't expect always to have it his own way, can he, Dr. Watson? ³⁵⁰Step this way, if you please, gentlemen, and I think I can convince you once for all that it was John McFarlane who did this crime.”

³⁵¹He led us through the passage and out into a dark hall beyond.

³⁵²“This is where young McFarlane must have come out to get his hat after the crime was done,” said he. ³⁵³“Now, look at this.” ³⁵⁴With dramatic suddenness he struck a match and by its light exposed a stain of blood upon the whitewashed wall. ³⁵⁵As he held the match nearer I saw that it was more than a stain. ³⁵⁶It was the well-marked print of a thumb.

³⁵⁷“Look at that with your magnifying glass, Mr. Holmes.”

³⁵⁸“Yes, I am doing so.”

³⁵⁹“You are aware that no two thumb marks are alike?”

³⁶⁰“I have heard something of the kind.”

³⁶¹“Well, then, will you please compare that print with this wax impression of young McFarlane's right thumb, taken by my orders this morning?”

³⁶²As he held the waxen print close to the blood-stain it did not take a magnifying glass to see that the two were undoubtedly from the same thumb. ³⁶³It was evident to me that our unfortunate client was lost.

³⁶⁴“That is final,” said Lestrade.

³⁶⁵“Yes, that is final,” I involuntarily echoed.

³⁶⁶“It is final,” said Holmes.

³⁶⁷Something in his tone caught my ear, and I turned to look at him. ³⁶⁸An extraordinary change had come over his face. ³⁶⁹It was writhing with inward merriment. ³⁷⁰His two eyes were shining like stars. ³⁷¹It seemed to me that he was making desperate efforts to restrain a convulsive attack of laughter.

³⁷²“Dear me! ³⁷³Dear me!” he said at last. ³⁷⁴“Well, now, who would have thought it? ³⁷⁵And how deceptive appearances may be, to be sure! ³⁷⁶Such a nice young man to look at! ³⁷⁷It is a lesson to us not to trust our own judgment, is it not, Lestrade?”

³⁷⁸“Yes, some of us are a little too much inclined to be cocksure, Mr. Holmes,” said Lestrade. ³⁷⁹The man's insolence was maddening, but we could not resent it.

³⁸⁰“What a providential thing that this young man should press his right thumb against the wall in taking his hat from the peg! ³⁸¹Such a very natural action, too, if you come to think of it.” ³⁸²Holmes was outwardly calm, but his whole body gave a wriggle of suppressed excitement as he spoke. ³⁸³“By the way, Lestrade, who made this remarkable discovery?”

³⁸⁴“It was the housekeeper, Mrs. Lexington, who drew the night constable's attention to it.”

³⁸⁵“Where was the night constable?”

³⁸⁶“He remained on guard in the bedroom where the crime was committed, so as to see that nothing was touched.”

³⁸⁷“But why didn't the police see this mark yesterday?”

³⁸⁸“Well, we had no particular reason to make a careful examination of the hall. ³⁸⁹Besides, it's not in a very prominent place, as you see.”

³⁹⁰“No, no, of course not. ³⁹¹I suppose there is no doubt that the mark was there yesterday?”

³⁹²Lestrade looked at Holmes as if he thought he was going out of his mind. ³⁹³I confess that I was myself surprised both at his hilarious manner and at his rather wild observation.

³⁹⁴“I don't know whether you think that McFarlane came out of jail in the dead of the night in order to strengthen the evidence against himself,” said Lestrade. ³⁹⁵“I leave it to any expert in the world whether that is not the mark of his thumb.”

³⁹⁶“It is unquestionably the mark of his thumb.”

³⁹⁷“There, that's enough,” said Lestrade. ³⁹⁸“I am a practical man, Mr. Holmes, and when I have got my evidence I come to my conclusions. ³⁹⁹If you have anything to say you will find me writing my report in the sitting-room.”

⁴⁰⁰Holmes had recovered his equanimity, though I still seemed to detect gleams of amusement in his expression.

⁴⁰¹“Dear me, this is a very sad development, Watson, is it not?” said he. ⁴⁰²“And yet there are singular points about it which hold out some hopes for our client.”

⁴⁰³“I am delighted to hear it,” said I, heartily. ⁴⁰⁴“I was afraid it was all up with him.”

⁴⁰⁵“I would hardly go so far as to say that, my dear Watson. ⁴⁰⁶The fact is that there is one really serious flaw in this evidence to which our friend attaches so much importance.”

⁴⁰⁷“Indeed, Holmes! ⁴⁰⁸What is it?”

⁴⁰⁹“Only this: that I know that that mark was not there when I examined the hall yesterday. ⁴¹⁰And now, Watson, let us have a little stroll round in the sunshine.”

⁴¹¹With a confused brain, but with a heart into which some warmth of hope was returning, I accompanied my friend in a walk round the garden. ⁴¹²Holmes took each face of the house in turn and examined it with great interest. ⁴¹³He then led the way inside and went over the whole building from basement to attics. ⁴¹⁴Most of the rooms were unfurnished, but none the less Holmes inspected them all minutely. ⁴¹⁵Finally, on the top corridor, which ran outside three untenanted bedrooms, he again was seized with a spasm of merriment.

⁴¹⁶“There are really some very unique features about this case, Watson,” said he. ⁴¹⁷“I think it is time now that we took our friend Lestrade into our confidence. ⁴¹⁸He has had his little smile at our expense,

and perhaps we may do as much by him if my reading of this problem proves to be correct. ⁴¹⁹Yes, yes; I think I see how we should approach it.”

⁴²⁰The Scotland Yard inspector was still writing in the parlour when Holmes interrupted him.

⁴²¹“I understood that you were writing a report of this case,” said he.

⁴²²“So I am.”

⁴²³“Don't you think it may be a little premature? ⁴²⁴I can't help thinking that your evidence is not complete.”

⁴²⁵Lestrade knew my friend too well to disregard his words. ⁴²⁶He laid down his pen and looked curiously at him.

⁴²⁷“What do you mean, Mr. Holmes?”

⁴²⁸“Only that there is an important witness whom you have not seen.”

⁴²⁹“Can you produce him?”

⁴³⁰“I think I can.”

⁴³¹“Then do so.”

⁴³²“I will do my best. ⁴³³How many constables have you?”

⁴³⁴“There are three within call.”

⁴³⁵“Excellent!” said Holmes. ⁴³⁶“May I ask if they are all large, able-bodied men with powerful voices?”

⁴³⁷“I have no doubt they are, though I fail to see what their voices have to do with it.”

⁴³⁸“Perhaps I can help you to see that and one or two other things as well,” said Holmes. ⁴³⁹“Kindly summon your men, and I will try.”

⁴⁴⁰Five minutes later three policemen had assembled in the hall.

⁴⁴¹“In the outhouse you will find a considerable quantity of straw,” said Holmes. ⁴⁴²“I will ask you to carry in two bundles of it. ⁴⁴³I think it will be of the greatest assistance in producing the witness whom I require. ⁴⁴⁴Thank you very much. I believe you have some matches in your pocket, Watson. ⁴⁴⁵Now, Mr. Lestrade, I will ask you all to accompany me to the top landing.”

⁴⁴⁶As I have said, there was a broad corridor there, which ran outside three empty bedrooms. ⁴⁴⁷At one end of the corridor we were all marshalled by Sherlock Holmes, the constables grinning and Lestrade staring at my friend with amazement, expectation, and derision chasing each other across his features.

⁴⁴⁸Holmes stood before us with the air of a conjurer who is performing a trick.

⁴⁴⁹“Would you kindly send one of your constables for two buckets of water? ⁴⁵⁰Put the straw on the floor here, free from the wall on either side. ⁴⁵¹Now I think that we are all ready.”

⁴⁵²Lestrade's face had begun to grow red and angry.

⁴⁵³“I don't know whether you are playing a game with us, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said he. ⁴⁵⁴“If you know anything, you can surely say it without all this tomfoolery.”

⁴⁵⁵“I assure you, my good Lestrade, that I have an excellent reason for everything that I do. ⁴⁵⁶You may possibly remember that you chaffed me a little some hours ago, when the sun seemed on your side of the hedge, so you must not grudge me a little pomp and ceremony now. ⁴⁵⁷Might I ask you, Watson, to open that window, and then to put a match to the edge of the straw?”

⁴⁵⁸I did so, and, driven by the draught, a coil of grey smoke swirled down the corridor, while the dry straw crackled and flamed.

⁴⁵⁹“Now we must see if we can find this witness for you, Lestrade. ⁴⁶⁰Might I ask you all to join in the cry of ‘Fire!’? ⁴⁶¹Now, then; one, two, three—”

⁴⁶²“Fire!” we all yelled.

⁴⁶³“Thank you. ⁴⁶⁴I will trouble you once again.”

⁴⁶⁵“Fire!”

⁴⁶⁶“Just once more, gentlemen, and all together.”

⁴⁶⁷“Fire!” ⁴⁶⁸The shout must have rung over Norwood.

⁴⁶⁹It had hardly died away when an amazing thing happened. ⁴⁷⁰A door suddenly flew open out of what appeared to be solid wall at the end of the corridor, and a little, wizened man darted out of it, like a rabbit out of its burrow.

⁴⁷¹“Capital!” said Holmes, calmly. ⁴⁷²“Watson, a bucket of water over the straw. ⁴⁷³That will do! ⁴⁷⁴Lestrade, allow me to present you with your principal missing witness, Mr. Jonas Oldacre.”

⁴⁷⁵The detective stared at the new-comer with blank amazement. ⁴⁷⁶The latter was blinking in the bright light of the corridor, and peering at us and at the smouldering fire. ⁴⁷⁷It was an odious face—crafty, vicious, malignant, with shifty, light-grey eyes and white eyelashes.

⁴⁷⁸“What’s this, then?” said Lestrade at last. ⁴⁷⁹“What have you been doing all this time, eh?”

⁴⁸⁰Oldacre gave an uneasy laugh, shrinking back from the furious red face of the angry detective.

⁴⁸¹“I have done no harm.”

⁴⁸²“No harm? ⁴⁸³You have done your best to get an innocent man hanged. ⁴⁸⁴If it wasn’t for this gentleman here, I am not sure that you would not have succeeded.”

⁴⁸⁵The wretched creature began to whimper.

⁴⁸⁶“I am sure, sir, it was only my practical joke.”

⁴⁸⁷“Oh! a joke, was it? ⁴⁸⁸You won’t find the laugh on your side, I promise you. ⁴⁸⁹Take him down and keep him in the sitting-room until I come. ⁴⁹⁰Mr. Holmes,” he continued, when they had gone, “I could not speak before the constables, but I don’t mind saying, in the presence of Dr. Watson, that this is the brightest thing that you have done yet, though it is a mystery to me how you did it. ⁴⁹¹You have saved an innocent man’s life, and you have prevented a very grave scandal, which would have ruined my reputation in the Force.”

⁴⁹²Holmes smiled and clapped Lestrade upon the shoulder.

⁴⁹³“Instead of being ruined, my good sir, you will find that your reputation has been enormously enhanced. ⁴⁹⁴Just make a few alterations in that report which you were writing, and they will understand how hard it is to throw dust in the eyes of Inspector Lestrade.”

⁴⁹⁵“And you don’t want your name to appear?”

⁴⁹⁶“Not at all. ⁴⁹⁷The work is its own reward. ⁴⁹⁸Perhaps I shall get the credit also at some distant day when I permit my zealous historian to lay out his foolscap once more—eh, Watson? ⁴⁹⁹Well, now, let us see where this rat has been lurking.”

⁵⁰⁰A lath-and-plaster partition had been run across the passage six feet from the end, with a door cunningly concealed in it. ⁵⁰¹It was lit within by slits under the eaves. ⁵⁰²A few articles of furniture and a supply of food and water were within, together with a number of books and papers.

⁵⁰³“There's the advantage of being a builder,” said Holmes, as we came out. ⁵⁰⁴“He was able to fix up his own little hiding-place without any confederate—save, of course, that precious housekeeper of his, whom I should lose no time in adding to your bag, Lestrade.”

⁵⁰⁵“I'll take your advice. ⁵⁰⁶But how did you know of this place, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵⁰⁷“I made up my mind that the fellow was in hiding in the house. ⁵⁰⁸When I paced one corridor and found it six feet shorter than the corresponding one below, it was pretty clear where he was. ⁵⁰⁹I thought he had not the nerve to lie quiet before an alarm of fire. ⁵¹⁰We could, of course, have gone in and taken him, but it amused me to make him reveal himself; besides, I owed you a little mystification, Lestrade, for your chaff in the morning.”

⁵¹¹“Well, sir, you certainly got equal with me on that. ⁵¹²But how in the world did you know that he was in the house at all?”

⁵¹³“The thumb-mark, Lestrade. ⁵¹⁴You said it was final; and so it was, in a very different sense. ⁵¹⁵I knew it had not been there the day before. ⁵¹⁶I pay a good deal of attention to matters of detail, as you may have observed, and I had examined the hall and was sure that the wall was clear. ⁵¹⁷Therefore, it had been put on during the night.”

⁵¹⁸“But how?”

⁵¹⁹“Very simply. ⁵²⁰When those packets were sealed up, Jonas Oldacre got McFarlane to secure one of the seals by putting his thumb upon the soft wax. ⁵²¹It would be done so quickly and so naturally that I dare say the young man himself has no recollection of it. ⁵²²Very likely it just so happened, and Oldacre had himself no notion of the use he would put it to. ⁵²³Brooding over the case in that den of his, it suddenly struck him what absolutely damning evidence he could make against McFarlane by using that thumb-mark. ⁵²⁴It was the simplest thing in the world for him to take a wax impression from the seal, to moisten it in as much blood as he could get from a pin-prick, and to put the mark upon the wall during the night, either with his own hand or with that of his housekeeper. ⁵²⁵If you examine among those documents which he took with him into his retreat I will lay you a wager that you find the seal with the thumb-mark upon it.”

⁵²⁶“Wonderful!” said Lestrade. ⁵²⁷“Wonderful! ⁵²⁸It's all as clear as crystal, as you put it. ⁵²⁹But what is the object of this deep deception, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵³⁰It was amusing to me to see how the detective's overbearing manner had changed suddenly to that of a child asking questions of its teacher.

⁵³¹“Well, I don't think that is very hard to explain. ⁵³²A very deep, malicious, vindictive person is the gentleman who is now awaiting us downstairs. ⁵³³You know that he was once refused by McFarlane's mother? ⁵³⁴You don't! ⁵³⁵I told you that you should go to Blackheath first and Norwood afterwards. ⁵³⁶Well, this injury, as he would consider it, has rankled in his wicked, scheming brain, and all his life he has longed for vengeance, but never seen his chance. ⁵³⁷During the last year or two things have gone against him—secret speculation, I think—and he finds himself in a bad way. ⁵³⁸He determines to swindle his creditors, and for this purpose he pays large cheques to a certain Mr. Cornelius, who is, I imagine, himself under another name. ⁵³⁹I have not traced these cheques yet, but I have no doubt that they were banked under that name at some provincial town where Oldacre from time to time led a double existence. ⁵⁴⁰He intended to change his name altogether, draw this money, and vanish, starting life again elsewhere.”

⁵⁴¹“Well, that's likely enough.”

⁵⁴²“It would strike him that in disappearing he might throw all pursuit off his track, and at the same time have an ample and crushing revenge upon his old sweetheart, if he could give the impression that he had been murdered by her only child. ⁵⁴³It was a masterpiece of villainy, and he carried it out like a master. ⁵⁴⁴The idea of the will, which would give an obvious motive for the crime, the secret visit unknown to his own parents, the retention of the stick, the blood, and the animal remains and buttons in the wood-pile, all were admirable. ⁵⁴⁵It was a net from which it seemed to me a few hours ago that there was no possible escape. ⁵⁴⁶But he had not that supreme gift of the artist, the knowledge of when to stop. ⁵⁴⁷He wished to improve that which was already perfect—to draw the rope tighter yet round the neck of his unfortunate victim—and so he ruined all. ⁵⁴⁸Let us descend, Lestrade. ⁵⁴⁹There are just one or two questions that I would ask him.”

⁵⁵⁰The malignant creature was seated in his own parlour with a policeman upon each side of him.

⁵⁵¹“It was a joke, my good sir, a practical joke, nothing more,” he whined incessantly. ⁵⁵²“I assure you, sir, that I simply concealed myself in order to see the effect of my disappearance, and I am sure that you would not be so unjust as to imagine that I would have allowed any harm to befall poor young Mr. McFarlane.”

⁵⁵³“That's for a jury to decide,” said Lestrade. ⁵⁵⁴“Anyhow, we shall have you on a charge of conspiracy, if not for attempted murder.”

⁵⁵⁵“And you'll probably find that your creditors will impound the banking account of Mr. Cornelius,” said Holmes.

⁵⁵⁶The little man started and turned his malignant eyes upon my friend.

⁵⁵⁷“I have to thank you for a good deal,” said he. ⁵⁵⁸“Perhaps I'll pay my debt some day.”

⁵⁵⁹Holmes smiled indulgently.

⁵⁶⁰“I fancy that for some few years you will find your time very fully occupied,” said he. ⁵⁶¹“By the way, what was it you put into the wood-pile besides your old trousers? ⁵⁶²A dead dog, or rabbits, or what? ⁵⁶³You won't tell? ⁵⁶⁴Dear me, how very unkind of you! ⁵⁶⁵Well, well, I dare say that a couple of rabbits would account both for the blood and for the charred ashes. ⁵⁶⁶If ever you write an account, Watson, you can make rabbits serve your turn.”

The Adventure of the Dancing Men

¹Holmes had been seated for some hours in silence with his long, thin back curved over a chemical vessel in which he was brewing a particularly malodorous product. ²His head was sunk upon his breast, and he looked from my point of view like a strange, lank bird, with dull grey plumage and a black top-knot.

³“So, Watson,” said he, suddenly, “you do not propose to invest in South African securities?”

⁴I gave a start of astonishment. ⁵Accustomed as I was to Holmes's curious faculties, this sudden intrusion into my most intimate thoughts was utterly inexplicable.

⁶“How on earth do you know that?” I asked.

⁷He wheeled round upon his stool, with a steaming test-tube in his hand and a gleam of amusement in his deep-set eyes.

⁸“Now, Watson, confess yourself utterly taken aback,” said he.

⁹“I am.”

¹⁰“I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect.”

¹¹“Why?”

¹²“Because in five minutes you will say that it is all so absurdly simple.”

¹³“I am sure that I shall say nothing of the kind.”

¹⁴“You see, my dear Watson”—he propped his test-tube in the rack and began to lecture with the air of a professor addressing his class—“it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. ¹⁵If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly a meretricious, effect. ¹⁶Now, it was not really difficult, by an inspection of the groove between your left forefinger and thumb, to feel sure that you did not propose to invest your small capital in the goldfields.”

¹⁷“I see no connection.”

¹⁸“Very likely not; but I can quickly show you a close connection. ¹⁹Here are the missing links of the very simple chain: ²⁰1. You had chalk between your left finger and thumb when you returned from the club last night. ²¹2. You put chalk there when you play billiards to steady the cue. ²²3. You never play billiards except with Thurston. ²³4. You told me four weeks ago that Thurston had an option on some South African property which would expire in a month, and which he desired you to share with him. ²⁴5. Your cheque-book is locked in my drawer, and you have not asked for the key. ²⁵6. You do not propose to invest your money in this manner.”

²⁶“How absurdly simple!” I cried.

²⁷“Quite so!” said he, a little nettled. ²⁸“Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you. ²⁹Here is an unexplained one. ³⁰See what you can make of that, friend Watson.” ³¹He tossed a sheet of paper upon the table and turned once more to his chemical analysis.

³²I looked with amazement at the absurd hieroglyphics upon the paper.

³³“Why, Holmes, it is a child's drawing,” I cried.

³⁴“Oh, that's your idea!”

³⁵“What else should it be?”

³⁶“That is what Mr. Hilton Cubitt, of Ridling Thorpe Manor, Norfolk, is very anxious to know. ³⁷This little conundrum came by the first post, and he was to follow by the next train. ³⁸There's a ring at the bell, Watson. ³⁹I should not be very much surprised if this were he.”

⁴⁰A heavy step was heard upon the stairs, and an instant later there entered a tall, ruddy, clean-shaven gentleman, whose clear eyes and florid cheeks told of a life led far from the fogs of Baker Street. ⁴¹He seemed to bring a whiff of his strong, fresh, bracing, east-coast air with him as he entered. ⁴²Having shaken hands with each of us, he was about to sit down when his eye rested upon the paper with the curious markings, which I had just examined and left upon the table.

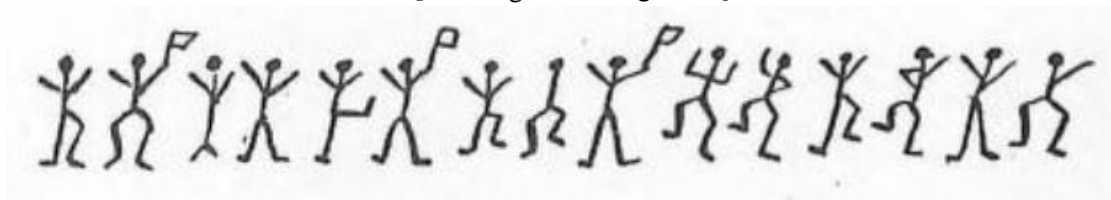
⁴³“Well, Mr. Holmes, what do you make of these?” he cried. ⁴⁴“They told me that you were fond of queer mysteries, and I don't think you can find a queerer one than that. ⁴⁵I sent the paper on ahead so that you might have time to study it before I came.”

⁴⁶“It is certainly rather a curious production,” said Holmes. ⁴⁷“At first sight it would appear to be some childish prank. ⁴⁸It consists of a number of absurd little figures dancing across the paper upon which they are drawn. ⁴⁹Why should you attribute any importance to so grotesque an object?”

⁵⁰“I never should, Mr. Holmes. ⁵¹But my wife does. ⁵²It is frightening her to death. ⁵³She says nothing, but I can see terror in her eyes. ⁵⁴That's why I want to sift the matter to the bottom.”

⁵⁵Holmes held up the paper so that the sunlight shone full upon it. ⁵⁶It was a page torn from a note-book. ⁵⁷The markings were done in pencil, and ran in this way:—

⁵⁸[Dancing Men Image One]



⁵⁹Holmes examined it for some time, and then, folding it carefully up, he placed it in his pocket-book.

⁶⁰“This promises to be a most interesting and unusual case,” said he. ⁶¹“You gave me a few particulars in your letter, Mr. Hilton Cubitt, but I should be very much obliged if you would kindly go over it all again for the benefit of my friend, Dr. Watson.”

⁶²“I'm not much of a story-teller,” said our visitor, nervously clasping and unclasping his great, strong hands. ⁶³“You'll just ask me anything that I don't make clear. ⁶⁴I'll begin at the time of my marriage last year; but I want to say first of all that, though I'm not a rich man, my people have been at Ridling Thorpe for a matter of five centuries, and there is no better known family in the County of Norfolk. ⁶⁵Last year I came up to London for the Jubilee, and I stopped at a boarding-house in Russell Square, because Parker, the vicar of our parish, was staying in it. ⁶⁶There was an American young lady there—Patrick was the name—Elsie Patrick. ⁶⁷In some way we became friends, until before my month was up I was as much in love as a man could be. ⁶⁸We were quietly married at a registry office, and we returned to Norfolk a wedded couple. ⁶⁹You'll think it very mad, Mr. Holmes, that a man of a good old family should marry a wife in this fashion, knowing nothing of her past or of her people; but if you saw her and knew her it would help you to understand.

⁷⁰“She was very straight about it, was Elsie. ⁷¹I can't say that she did not give me every chance of getting out of it if I wished to do so. ⁷²‘I have had some very disagreeable associations in my life,’ said she; ‘I

wish to forget all about them. ⁷³I would rather never allude to the past, for it is very painful to me. ⁷⁴If you take me, Hilton, you will take a woman who has nothing that she need be personally ashamed of; but you will have to be content with my word for it, and to allow me to be silent as to all that passed up to the time when I became yours. ⁷⁵If these conditions are too hard, then go back to Norfolk and leave me to the lonely life in which you found me.' ⁷⁶It was only the day before our wedding that she said those very words to me. ⁷⁷I told her that I was content to take her on her own terms, and I have been as good as my word.

⁷⁸"Well, we have been married now for a year, and very happy we have been. ⁷⁹But about a month ago, at the end of June, I saw for the first time signs of trouble. ⁸⁰One day my wife received a letter from America. ⁸¹I saw the American stamp. ⁸²She turned deadly white, read the letter, and threw it into the fire. ⁸³She made no allusion to it afterwards, and I made none, for a promise is a promise; but she has never known an easy hour from that moment. ⁸⁴There is always a look of fear upon her face—a look as if she were waiting and expecting. ⁸⁵She would do better to trust me. ⁸⁶She would find that I was her best friend. ⁸⁷But until she speaks I can say nothing. ⁸⁸Mind you, she is a truthful woman, Mr. Holmes, and whatever trouble there may have been in her past life it has been no fault of hers. ⁸⁹I am only a simple Norfolk squire, but there is not a man in England who ranks his family honour more highly than I do. ⁹⁰She knows it well, and she knew it well before she married me. ⁹¹She would never bring any stain upon it—of that I am sure.

⁹²"Well, now I come to the queer part of my story. ⁹³About a week ago—it was the Tuesday of last week—I found on one of the window-sills a number of absurd little dancing figures, like these upon the paper. ⁹⁴They were scrawled with chalk. ⁹⁵I thought that it was the stable-boy who had drawn them, but the lad swore he knew nothing about it. ⁹⁶Anyhow, they had come there during the night. ⁹⁷I had them washed out, and I only mentioned the matter to my wife afterwards. ⁹⁸To my surprise she took it very seriously, and begged me if any more came to let her see them. ⁹⁹None did come for a week, and then yesterday morning I found this paper lying on the sun-dial in the garden. ¹⁰⁰I showed it to Elsie, and down she dropped in a dead faint. ¹⁰¹Since then she has looked like a woman in a dream, half dazed, and with terror always lurking in her eyes. ¹⁰²It was then that I wrote and sent the paper to you, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁰³It was not a thing that I could take to the police, for they would have laughed at me, but you will tell me what to do. ¹⁰⁴I am not a rich man; but if there is any danger threatening my little woman I would spend my last copper to shield her."

¹⁰⁵He was a fine creature, this man of the old English soil, simple, straight, and gentle, with his great, earnest blue eyes and broad, comely face. ¹⁰⁶His love for his wife and his trust in her shone in his features. ¹⁰⁷Holmes had listened to his story with the utmost attention, and now he sat for some time in silent thought.

¹⁰⁸"Don't you think, Mr. Cubitt," said he, at last, "that your best plan would be to make a direct appeal to your wife, and to ask her to share her secret with you?"

¹⁰⁹Hilton Cubitt shook his massive head.

¹¹⁰"A promise is a promise, Mr. Holmes. ¹¹¹If Elsie wished to tell me she would. ¹¹²If not, it is not for me to force her confidence. ¹¹³But I am justified in taking my own line—and I will."

¹¹⁴"Then I will help you with all my heart. ¹¹⁵In the first place, have you heard of any strangers being seen in your neighbourhood?"

¹¹⁶"No."

¹¹⁷"I presume that it is a very quiet place. ¹¹⁸Any fresh face would cause comment?"

¹¹⁹"In the immediate neighbourhood, yes. ¹²⁰But we have several small watering-places not very far away. ¹²¹And the farmers take in lodgers."

¹²²“These hieroglyphics have evidently a meaning. ¹²³If it is a purely arbitrary one it may be impossible for us to solve it. ¹²⁴If, on the other hand, it is systematic, I have no doubt that we shall get to the bottom of it. ¹²⁵But this particular sample is so short that I can do nothing, and the facts which you have brought me are so indefinite that we have no basis for an investigation. ¹²⁶I would suggest that you return to Norfolk, that you keep a keen look-out, and that you take an exact copy of any fresh dancing men which may appear. ¹²⁷It is a thousand pities that we have not a reproduction of those which were done in chalk upon the window-sill. ¹²⁸Make a discreet inquiry also as to any strangers in the neighbourhood. ¹²⁹When you have collected some fresh evidence come to me again. ¹³⁰That is the best advice which I can give you, Mr. Hilton Cubitt. ¹³¹If there are any pressing fresh developments I shall be always ready to run down and see you in your Norfolk home.”

¹³²The interview left Sherlock Holmes very thoughtful, and several times in the next few days I saw him take his slip of paper from his note-book and look long and earnestly at the curious figures inscribed upon it. ¹³³He made no allusion to the affair, however, until one afternoon a fortnight or so later. ¹³⁴I was going out when he called me back.

¹³⁵“You had better stay here, Watson.”

¹³⁶“Why?”

¹³⁷“Because I had a wire from Hilton Cubitt this morning—you remember Hilton Cubitt, of the dancing men? ¹³⁸He was to reach Liverpool Street at one-twenty. ¹³⁹He may be here at any moment. ¹⁴⁰I gather from his wire that there have been some new incidents of importance.”

¹⁴¹We had not long to wait, for our Norfolk squire came straight from the station as fast as a hansom could bring him. ¹⁴²He was looking worried and depressed, with tired eyes and a lined forehead.

¹⁴³“It's getting on my nerves, this business, Mr. Holmes,” said he, as he sank, like a wearied man, into an arm-chair. ¹⁴⁴“It's bad enough to feel that you are surrounded by unseen, unknown folk, who have some kind of design upon you; but when, in addition to that, you know that it is just killing your wife by inches, then it becomes as much as flesh and blood can endure. ¹⁴⁵She's wearing away under it—just wearing away before my eyes.”

¹⁴⁶“Has she said anything yet?”

¹⁴⁷“No, Mr. Holmes, she has not. ¹⁴⁸And yet there have been times when the poor girl has wanted to speak, and yet could not quite bring herself to take the plunge. ¹⁴⁹I have tried to help her; but I dare say I did it clumsily, and scared her off from it. ¹⁵⁰She has spoken about my old family, and our reputation in the county, and our pride in our unsullied honour, and I always felt it was leading to the point; but somehow it turned off before we got there.”

¹⁵¹“But you have found out something for yourself?”

¹⁵²“A good deal, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁵³I have several fresh dancing men pictures for you to examine, and, what is more important, I have seen the fellow.”

¹⁵⁴“What, the man who draws them?”

¹⁵⁵“Yes, I saw him at his work. ¹⁵⁶But I will tell you everything in order. ¹⁵⁷When I got back after my visit to you, the very first thing I saw next morning was a fresh crop of dancing men. ¹⁵⁸They had been drawn in chalk upon the black wooden door of the tool-house, which stands beside the lawn in full view of the front windows. ¹⁵⁹I took an exact copy, and here it is.” ¹⁶⁰He unfolded a paper and laid it upon the table. ¹⁶¹Here is a copy of the hieroglyphics:—

¹⁶²[Dancing Men Image Two]

¹⁶³ “Excellent!” said Holmes. ¹⁶⁴“Excellent! ¹⁶⁵Pray continue.”

¹⁶⁶“When I had taken the copy I rubbed out the marks; but two mornings later a fresh inscription had appeared. ¹⁶⁷I have a copy of it here”:—

¹⁶⁸[Dancing Men Image Three]

¹⁶⁹Holmes rubbed his hands and chuckled with delight.

¹⁷⁰“Our material is rapidly accumulating,” said he.

¹⁷¹“Three days later a message was left scrawled upon paper, and placed under a pebble upon the sundial. ¹⁷²Here it is. ¹⁷³The characters are, as you see, exactly the same as the last one. ¹⁷⁴After that I determined to lie in wait; so I got out my revolver and I sat up in my study, which overlooks the lawn and garden. ¹⁷⁵About two in the morning I was seated by the window, all being dark save for the moonlight outside, when I heard steps behind me, and there was my wife in her dressing-gown. ¹⁷⁶She implored me to come to bed. ¹⁷⁷I told her frankly that I wished to see who it was who played such absurd tricks upon us. ¹⁷⁸She answered that it was some senseless practical joke, and that I should not take any notice of it.

¹⁷⁹“If it really annoys you, Hilton, we might go and travel, you and I, and so avoid this nuisance.”

¹⁸⁰“What, be driven out of our own house by a practical joker?” said I. ¹⁸¹“Why, we should have the whole county laughing at us.”

¹⁸²“Well, come to bed,” said she, “and we can discuss it in the morning.”

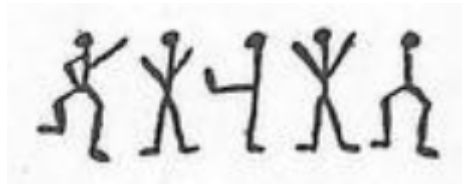
¹⁸³“Suddenly, as she spoke, I saw her white face grow whiter yet in the moonlight, and her hand tightened upon my shoulder. ¹⁸⁴Something was moving in the shadow of the tool-house. ¹⁸⁵I saw a dark, creeping figure which crawled round the corner and squatted in front of the door. ¹⁸⁶Seizing my pistol I was rushing out, when my wife threw her arms round me and held me with convulsive strength. ¹⁸⁷I tried to throw her off, but she clung to me most desperately. ¹⁸⁸At last I got clear, but by the time I had opened the door and reached the house the creature was gone. ¹⁸⁹He had left a trace of his presence, however, for there on the door was the very same arrangement of dancing men which had already twice appeared, and which I have copied on that paper. ¹⁹⁰There was no other sign of the fellow anywhere, though I ran all over the grounds. ¹⁹¹And yet the amazing thing is that he must have been there all the time, for when I examined the door again in the morning he had scrawled some more of his pictures under the line which I had already seen.”

¹⁹²“Have you that fresh drawing?”

¹⁹³“Yes; it is very short, but I made a copy of it, and here it is.”

¹⁹⁴Again he produced a paper. ¹⁹⁵The new dance was in this form:—

¹⁹⁶[Dancing Men Image Four]



¹⁹⁷“Tell me,” said Holmes—and I could see by his eyes that he was much excited—“was this a mere addition to the first, or did it appear to be entirely separate?”

¹⁹⁸“It was on a different panel of the door.”

¹⁹⁹“Excellent! ²⁰⁰This is far the most important of all for our purpose. ²⁰¹It fills me with hopes. ²⁰²Now, Mr. Hilton Cubitt, please continue your most interesting statement.”

²⁰³“I have nothing more to say, Mr. Holmes, except that I was angry with my wife that night for having held me back when I might have caught the skulking rascal. ²⁰⁴She said that she feared that I might come to harm. ²⁰⁵For an instant it had crossed my mind that perhaps what she really feared was that he might come to harm, for I could not doubt that she knew who this man was and what he meant by these strange signals. ²⁰⁶But there is a tone in my wife's voice, Mr. Holmes, and a look in her eyes which forbid doubt, and I am sure that it was indeed my own safety that was in her mind. ²⁰⁷There's the whole case, and now I want your advice as to what I ought to do. ²⁰⁸My own inclination is to put half-a-dozen of my farm lads in the shrubbery, and when this fellow comes again to give him such a hiding that he will leave us in peace for the future.”

²⁰⁹“I fear it is too deep a case for such simple remedies,” said Holmes. ²¹⁰“How long can you stay in London?”

²¹¹“I must go back to-day. ²¹²I would not leave my wife alone all night for anything. ²¹³She is very nervous and begged me to come back.”

²¹⁴“I dare say you are right. ²¹⁵But if you could have stopped I might possibly have been able to return with you in a day or two. ²¹⁶Meanwhile you will leave me these papers, and I think that it is very likely that I shall be able to pay you a visit shortly and to throw some light upon your case.”

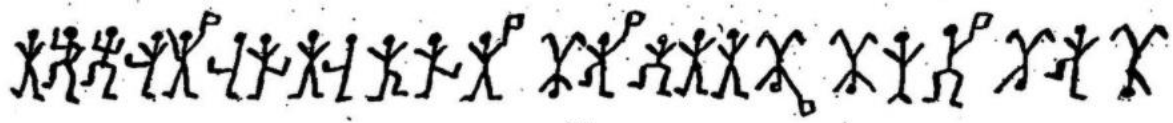
²¹⁷Sherlock Holmes preserved his calm professional manner until our visitor had left us, although it was easy for me, who knew him so well, to see that he was profoundly excited. ²¹⁸The moment that Hilton Cubitt's broad back had disappeared through the door my comrade rushed to the table, laid out all the slips of paper containing dancing men in front of him, and threw himself into an intricate and elaborate calculation. ²¹⁹For two hours I watched him as he covered sheet after sheet of paper with figures and letters, so completely absorbed in his task that he had evidently forgotten my presence. ²²⁰Sometimes he was making progress and whistled and sang at his work; sometimes he was puzzled, and would sit for long spells with a furrowed brow and a vacant eye. ²²¹Finally he sprang from his chair with a cry of satisfaction, and walked up and down the room rubbing his hands together. ²²²Then he wrote a long telegram upon a cable form. ²²³“If my answer to this is as I hope, you will have a very pretty case to add to your collection, Watson,” said he. ²²⁴“I expect that we shall be able to go down to Norfolk to-morrow, and to take our friend some very definite news as to the secret of his annoyance.”

²²⁵I confess that I was filled with curiosity, but I was aware that Holmes liked to make his disclosures at his own time and in his own way; so I waited until it should suit him to take me into his confidence.

²²⁶But there was a delay in that answering telegram, and two days of impatience followed, during which Holmes pricked up his ears at every ring of the bell. ²²⁷On the evening of the second there came a letter

from Hilton Cubitt. ²²⁸All was quiet with him, save that a long inscription had appeared that morning upon the pedestal of the sun-dial. ²²⁹He enclosed a copy of it, which is here reproduced:—

²³⁰[Dancing Men Image Five]



²³¹Holmes bent over this grotesque frieze for some minutes, and then suddenly sprang to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and dismay. ²³²His face was haggard with anxiety.

²³³“We have let this affair go far enough,” said he. ²³⁴“Is there a train to North Walsham to-night?”

²³⁵I turned up the time-table. ²³⁶The last had just gone.

²³⁷“Then we shall breakfast early and take the very first in the morning,” said Holmes. ²³⁸“Our presence is most urgently needed. ²³⁹Ah! here is our expected cablegram. ²⁴⁰One moment, Mrs. Hudson; there may be an answer. ²⁴¹No, that is quite as I expected. ²⁴²This message makes it even more essential that we should not lose an hour in letting Hilton Cubitt know how matters stand, for it is a singular and a dangerous web in which our simple Norfolk squire is entangled.”

²⁴³So, indeed, it proved, and as I come to the dark conclusion of a story which had seemed to me to be only childish and bizarre I experience once again the dismay and horror with which I was filled. ²⁴⁴Would that I had some brighter ending to communicate to my readers, but these are the chronicles of fact, and I must follow to their dark crisis the strange chain of events which for some days made Ridling Thorpe Manor a household word through the length and breadth of England.

²⁴⁵We had hardly alighted at North Walsham, and mentioned the name of our destination, when the station-master hurried towards us. ²⁴⁶“I suppose that you are the detectives from London?” said he.

²⁴⁷A look of annoyance passed over Holmes's face.

²⁴⁸“What makes you think such a thing?”

²⁴⁹“Because Inspector Martin from Norwich has just passed through. ²⁵⁰But maybe you are the surgeons. ²⁵¹She's not dead—or wasn't by last accounts. ²⁵²You may be in time to save her yet—though it be for the gallows.”

²⁵³Holmes's brow was dark with anxiety.

²⁵⁴“We are going to Ridling Thorpe Manor,” said he, “but we have heard nothing of what has passed there.”

²⁵⁵“It's a terrible business,” said the station-master. ²⁵⁶“They are shot, both Mr. Hilton Cubitt and his wife. ²⁵⁷She shot him and then herself—so the servants say. ²⁵⁸He's dead and her life is despaired of. ²⁵⁹Dear, dear, one of the oldest families in the County of Norfolk, and one of the most honoured.”

²⁶⁰Without a word Holmes hurried to a carriage, and during the long seven miles' drive he never opened his mouth. ²⁶¹Seldom have I seen him so utterly despondent. ²⁶²He had been uneasy during all our journey from town, and I had observed that he had turned over the morning papers with anxious attention; but now this sudden realization of his worst fears left him in a blank melancholy. ²⁶³He leaned back in his seat, lost in gloomy speculation. ²⁶⁴Yet there was much around to interest us, for we were passing through as singular a country-side as any in England, where a few scattered cottages represented the population of to-day, while on every hand enormous square-towered churches bristled up from the flat, green landscape and told of the glory and prosperity of old East Anglia. ²⁶⁵At last the violet rim of

the German Ocean appeared over the green edge of the Norfolk coast, and the driver pointed with his whip to two old brick and timber gables which projected from a grove of trees. ²⁶⁶“That's Ridling Thorpe Manor,” said he.

²⁶⁷As we drove up to the porticoed front door I observed in front of it, beside the tennis lawn, the black tool-house and the pedestalled sun-dial with which we had such strange associations. ²⁶⁸A dapper little man, with a quick, alert manner and a waxed moustache, had just descended from a high dog-cart. ²⁶⁹He introduced himself as Inspector Martin, of the Norfolk Constabulary, and he was considerably astonished when he heard the name of my companion.

²⁷⁰“Why, Mr. Holmes, the crime was only committed at three this morning. ²⁷¹How could you hear of it in London and get to the spot as soon as I?”

²⁷²“I anticipated it. ²⁷³I came in the hope of preventing it.”

²⁷⁴“Then you must have important evidence of which we are ignorant, for they were said to be a most united couple.”

²⁷⁵“I have only the evidence of the dancing men,” said Holmes. ²⁷⁶“I will explain the matter to you later.

²⁷⁷Meanwhile, since it is too late to prevent this tragedy, I am very anxious that I should use the knowledge which I possess in order to ensure that justice be done. ²⁷⁸Will you associate me in your investigation, or will you prefer that I should act independently?”

²⁷⁹“I should be proud to feel that we were acting together, Mr. Holmes,” said the inspector, earnestly.

²⁸⁰“In that case I should be glad to hear the evidence and to examine the premises without an instant of unnecessary delay.”

²⁸¹Inspector Martin had the good sense to allow my friend to do things in his own fashion, and contented himself with carefully noting the results. ²⁸²The local surgeon, an old, white-haired man, had just come down from Mrs. Hilton Cubitt's room, and he reported that her injuries were serious, but not necessarily fatal. ²⁸³The bullet had passed through the front of her brain, and it would probably be some time before she could regain consciousness. ²⁸⁴On the question of whether she had been shot or had shot herself he would not venture to express any decided opinion. ²⁸⁵Certainly the bullet had been discharged at very close quarters. ²⁸⁶There was only the one pistol found in the room, two barrels of which had been emptied. ²⁸⁷Mr. Hilton Cubitt had been shot through the heart. ²⁸⁸It was equally conceivable that he had shot her and then himself, or that she had been the criminal, for the revolver lay upon the floor midway between them.

²⁸⁹“Has he been moved?” asked Holmes.

²⁹⁰“We have moved nothing except the lady. ²⁹¹We could not leave her lying wounded upon the floor.”

²⁹²“How long have you been here, doctor?”

²⁹³“Since four o'clock.”

²⁹⁴“Anyone else?”

²⁹⁵“Yes, the constable here.”

²⁹⁶“And you have touched nothing?”

²⁹⁷“Nothing.”

²⁹⁸“You have acted with great discretion. ²⁹⁹Who sent for you?”

³⁰⁰“The housemaid, Saunders.”

³⁰¹“Was it she who gave the alarm?”

³⁰²“She and Mrs. King, the cook.”

³⁰³“Where are they now?”

³⁰⁴“In the kitchen, I believe.”

³⁰⁵“Then I think we had better hear their story at once.”

³⁰⁶The old hall, oak-panelled and high-windowed, had been turned into a court of investigation. ³⁰⁷Holmes sat in a great, old-fashioned chair, his inexorable eyes gleaming out of his haggard face. ³⁰⁸I could read in them a set purpose to devote his life to this quest until the client whom he had failed to save should at last be avenged. ³⁰⁹The trim Inspector Martin, the old, grey-headed country doctor, myself, and a stolid village policeman made up the rest of that strange company.

³¹⁰The two women told their story clearly enough. ³¹¹They had been aroused from their sleep by the sound of an explosion, which had been followed a minute later by a second one. ³¹²They slept in adjoining rooms, and Mrs. King had rushed in to Saunders. ³¹³Together they had descended the stairs. ³¹⁴The door of the study was open and a candle was burning upon the table. ³¹⁵Their master lay upon his face in the centre of the room. ³¹⁶He was quite dead. ³¹⁷Near the window his wife was crouching, her head leaning against the wall. ³¹⁸She was horribly wounded, and the side of her face was red with blood. ³¹⁹She breathed heavily, but was incapable of saying anything. ³²⁰The passage, as well as the room, was full of smoke and the smell of powder. ³²¹The window was certainly shut and fastened upon the inside. ³²²Both women were positive upon the point. ³²³They had at once sent for the doctor and for the constable. ³²⁴Then, with the aid of the groom and the stable-boy, they had conveyed their injured mistress to her room. ³²⁵Both she and her husband had occupied the bed. ³²⁶She was clad in her dress—he in his dressing-gown, over his night clothes. ³²⁷Nothing had been moved in the study. ³²⁸So far as they knew there had never been any quarrel between husband and wife. ³²⁹They had always looked upon them as a very united couple.

³³⁰These were the main points of the servants' evidence. ³³¹In answer to Inspector Martin they were clear that every door was fastened upon the inside, and that no one could have escaped from the house. ³³²In answer to Holmes they both remembered that they were conscious of the smell of powder from the moment that they ran out of their rooms upon the top floor. ³³³“I commend that fact very carefully to your attention,” said Holmes to his professional colleague. ³³⁴“And now I think that we are in a position to undertake a thorough examination of the room.”

³³⁵The study proved to be a small chamber, lined on three sides with books, and with a writing-table facing an ordinary window, which looked out upon the garden. ³³⁶Our first attention was given to the body of the unfortunate squire, whose huge frame lay stretched across the room. ³³⁷His disordered dress showed that he had been hastily aroused from sleep. ³³⁸The bullet had been fired at him from the front, and had remained in his body after penetrating the heart. ³³⁹His death had certainly been instantaneous and painless. ³⁴⁰There was no powder-marking either upon his dressing-gown or on his hands. ³⁴¹According to the country surgeon the lady had stains upon her face, but none upon her hand.

³⁴²“The absence of the latter means nothing, though its presence may mean everything,” said Holmes. ³⁴³“Unless the powder from a badly-fitting cartridge happens to spurt backwards, one may fire many shots without leaving a sign. ³⁴⁴I would suggest that Mr. Cubitt's body may now be removed. ³⁴⁵I suppose, doctor, you have not recovered the bullet which wounded the lady?”

³⁴⁶“A serious operation will be necessary before that can be done. ³⁴⁷But there are still four cartridges in the revolver. ³⁴⁸Two have been fired and two wounds inflicted, so that each bullet can be accounted for.”

³⁴⁹“So it would seem,” said Holmes. ³⁵⁰“Perhaps you can account also for the bullet which has so obviously struck the edge of the window?”

³⁵¹He had turned suddenly, and his long, thin finger was pointing to a hole which had been drilled right through the lower window-sash about an inch above the bottom.

³⁵²“By George!” cried the inspector. ³⁵³“How ever did you see that?”

³⁵⁴“Because I looked for it.”

³⁵⁵“Wonderful!” said the country doctor. ³⁵⁶“You are certainly right, sir. ³⁵⁷Then a third shot has been fired, and therefore a third person must have been present. ³⁵⁸But who could that have been and how could he have got away?”

³⁵⁹“That is the problem which we are now about to solve,” said Sherlock Holmes. ³⁶⁰“You remember, Inspector Martin, when the servants said that on leaving their room they were at once conscious of a smell of powder I remarked that the point was an extremely important one?”

³⁶¹“Yes, sir; but I confess I did not quite follow you.”

³⁶²“It suggested that at the time of the firing the window as well as the door of the room had been open. ³⁶³Otherwise the fumes of powder could not have been blown so rapidly through the house. ³⁶⁴A draught in the room was necessary for that. ³⁶⁵Both door and window were only open for a very short time, however.”

³⁶⁶“How do you prove that?”

³⁶⁷“Because the candle has not guttered.”

³⁶⁸“Capital!” cried the inspector. ³⁶⁹“Capital!”

³⁷⁰“Feeling sure that the window had been open at the time of the tragedy I conceived that there might have been a third person in the affair, who stood outside this opening and fired through it. ³⁷¹Any shot directed at this person might hit the sash. ³⁷²I looked, and there, sure enough, was the bullet mark!”

³⁷³“But how came the window to be shut and fastened?”

³⁷⁴“The woman's first instinct would be to shut and fasten the window. ³⁷⁵But, halloa! what is this?”

³⁷⁶It was a lady's hand-bag which stood upon the study table—a trim little hand-bag of crocodile-skin and silver. ³⁷⁷Holmes opened it and turned the contents out. ³⁷⁸There were twenty fifty-pound notes of the Bank of England, held together by an india-rubber band—nothing else.

³⁷⁹“This must be preserved, for it will figure in the trial,” said Holmes, as he handed the bag with its contents to the inspector. ³⁸⁰“It is now necessary that we should try to throw some light upon this third bullet, which has clearly, from the splintering of the wood, been fired from inside the room. ³⁸¹I should like to see Mrs. King, the cook, again. ³⁸²You said, Mrs. King, that you were awakened by a loud explosion. ³⁸³When you said that, did you mean that it seemed to you to be louder than the second one?”

³⁸⁴“Well, sir, it wakened me from my sleep, and so it is hard to judge. ³⁸⁵But it did seem very loud.”

³⁸⁶“You don't think that it might have been two shots fired almost at the same instant?”

³⁸⁷“I am sure I couldn't say, sir.”

³⁸⁸“I believe that it was undoubtedly so. ³⁸⁹I rather think, Inspector Martin, that we have now exhausted all that this room can teach us. ³⁹⁰If you will kindly step round with me, we shall see what fresh evidence the garden has to offer.”

³⁹¹A flower-bed extended up to the study window, and we all broke into an exclamation as we approached it. ³⁹²The flowers were trampled down, and the soft soil was imprinted all over with footmarks. ³⁹³Large, masculine feet they were, with peculiarly long, sharp toes. ³⁹⁴Holmes hunted about among the grass and leaves like a retriever after a wounded bird. ³⁹⁵Then, with a cry of satisfaction, he bent forward and picked up a little brazen cylinder.

³⁹⁶"I thought so," said he; "the revolver had an ejector, and here is the third cartridge. ³⁹⁷I really think, Inspector Martin, that our case is almost complete."

³⁹⁸The country inspector's face had shown his intense amazement at the rapid and masterful progress of Holmes's investigation. ³⁹⁹At first he had shown some disposition to assert his own position; but now he was overcome with admiration and ready to follow without question wherever Holmes led.

⁴⁰⁰"Whom do you suspect?" he asked.

⁴⁰¹"I'll go into that later. ⁴⁰²There are several points in this problem which I have not been able to explain to you yet. ⁴⁰³Now that I have got so far I had best proceed on my own lines, and then clear the whole matter up once and for all."

⁴⁰⁴"Just as you wish, Mr. Holmes, so long as we get our man."

⁴⁰⁵"I have no desire to make mysteries, but it is impossible at the moment of action to enter into long and complex explanations. ⁴⁰⁶I have the threads of this affair all in my hand. ⁴⁰⁷Even if this lady should never recover consciousness we can still reconstruct the events of last night and ensure that justice be done. ⁴⁰⁸First of all I wish to know whether there is any inn in this neighbourhood known as 'Elrige's'?"

⁴⁰⁹The servants were cross-questioned, but none of them had heard of such a place. ⁴¹⁰The stable-boy threw a light upon the matter by remembering that a farmer of that name lived some miles off in the direction of East Ruston.

⁴¹¹"Is it a lonely farm?"

⁴¹²"Very lonely, sir."

⁴¹³"Perhaps they have not heard yet of all that happened here during the night?"

⁴¹⁴"Maybe not, sir."

⁴¹⁵Holmes thought for a little and then a curious smile played over his face.

⁴¹⁶"Saddle a horse, my lad," said he. ⁴¹⁷"I shall wish you to take a note to Elrige's Farm."

⁴¹⁸He took from his pocket the various slips of the dancing men. ⁴¹⁹With these in front of him he worked for some time at the study-table. ⁴²⁰Finally he handed a note to the boy, with directions to put it into the hands of the person to whom it was addressed, and especially to answer no questions of any sort which might be put to him. ⁴²¹I saw the outside of the note, addressed in straggling, irregular characters, very unlike Holmes's usual precise hand. ⁴²²It was consigned to Mr. Abe Slaney, Elrige's Farm, East Ruston, Norfolk.

⁴²³"I think, inspector," Holmes remarked, "that you would do well to telegraph for an escort, as, if my calculations prove to be correct, you may have a particularly dangerous prisoner to convey to the county jail. ⁴²⁴The boy who takes this note could no doubt forward your telegram. ⁴²⁵If there is an afternoon train to town, Watson, I think we should do well to take it, as I have a chemical analysis of some interest to finish, and this investigation draws rapidly to a close."

⁴²⁶When the youth had been dispatched with the note, Sherlock Holmes gave his instructions to the servants. ⁴²⁷If any visitor were to call asking for Mrs. Hilton Cubitt no information should be given as

to her condition, but he was to be shown at once into the drawing-room. ⁴²⁸He impressed these points upon them with the utmost earnestness. ⁴²⁹Finally he led the way into the drawing-room with the remark that the business was now out of our hands, and that we must while away the time as best we might until we could see what was in store for us. ⁴³⁰The doctor had departed to his patients, and only the inspector and myself remained.

⁴³¹“I think that I can help you to pass an hour in an interesting and profitable manner,” said Holmes, drawing his chair up to the table and spreading out in front of him the various papers upon which were recorded the antics of the dancing men. ⁴³²“As to you, friend Watson, I owe you every atonement for having allowed your natural curiosity to remain so long unsatisfied. ⁴³³To you, inspector, the whole incident may appeal as a remarkable professional study. ⁴³⁴I must tell you first of all the interesting circumstances connected with the previous consultations which Mr. Hilton Cubitt has had with me in Baker Street.” ⁴³⁵He then shortly recapitulated the facts which have already been recorded. ⁴³⁶“I have here in front of me these singular productions, at which one might smile had they not proved themselves to be the fore-runners of so terrible a tragedy. ⁴³⁷I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings, and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyze one hundred and sixty separate ciphers; but I confess that this is entirely new to me. ⁴³⁸The object of those who invented the system has apparently been to conceal that these characters convey a message, and to give the idea that they are the mere random sketches of children.

⁴³⁹“Having once recognised, however, that the symbols stood for letters, and having applied the rules which guide us in all forms of secret writings, the solution was easy enough. ⁴⁴⁰The first message submitted to me was so short that it was impossible for me to do more than to say with some confidence that the symbol

⁴⁴¹[Dancing Men Image Six]



⁴⁴²stood for E. ⁴⁴³As you are aware, E is the most common letter in the English alphabet, and it predominates to so marked an extent that even in a short sentence one would expect to find it most often. ⁴⁴⁴Out of fifteen symbols in the first message four were the same, so it was reasonable to set this down as E. ⁴⁴⁵It is true that in some cases the figure was bearing a flag and in some cases not, but it was probable from the way in which the flags were distributed that they were used to break the sentence up into words. ⁴⁴⁶I accepted this as a hypothesis, and noted that E was represented by

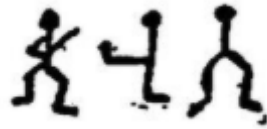
⁴⁴⁷[Dancing Men Image Seven]



⁴⁴⁸“But now came the real difficulty of the inquiry. ⁴⁴⁹The order of the English letters after E is by no means well marked, and any preponderance which may be shown in an average of a printed sheet may be reversed in a single short sentence. ⁴⁵⁰Speaking roughly, T, A, O, I, N, S, H, R, D, and L are the numerical order in which letters occur; but T, A, O, and I are very nearly abreast of each other, and it would be an endless task to try each combination until a meaning was arrived at. ⁴⁵¹I, therefore, waited for fresh material. ⁴⁵²In my second interview with Mr. Hilton Cubitt he was able to give me two other short sentences and one message, which appeared—since there was no flag—to be a single word.

⁴⁵³Here are the symbols. ⁴⁵⁴Now, in the single word I have already got the two E's coming second and fourth in a word of five letters. ⁴⁵⁵It might be 'sever,' or 'lever,' or 'never.' ⁴⁵⁶There can be no question that the latter as a reply to an appeal is far the most probable, and the circumstances pointed to its being a reply written by the lady. ⁴⁵⁷Accepting it as correct, we are now able to say that the symbols

⁴⁵⁸[Dancing Men Image Eight]



⁴⁵⁹stand respectively for N, V, and R.

⁴⁶⁰"Even now I was in considerable difficulty, but a happy thought put me in possession of several other letters. ⁴⁶¹It occurred to me that if these appeals came, as I expected, from someone who had been intimate with the lady in her early life, a combination which contained two E's with three letters between might very well stand for the name 'ELSIE.' ⁴⁶²On examination I found that such a combination formed the termination of the message which was three times repeated. ⁴⁶³It was certainly some appeal to 'Elsie.' ⁴⁶⁴In this way I had got my L, S, and I. ⁴⁶⁵But what appeal could it be? ⁴⁶⁶There were only four letters in the word which preceded 'Elsie,' and it ended in E. ⁴⁶⁷Surely the word must be 'COME.' ⁴⁶⁸I tried all other four letters ending in E, but could find none to fit the case. ⁴⁶⁹So now I was in possession of C, O, and M, and I was in a position to attack the first message once more, dividing it into words and putting dots for each symbol which was still unknown. ⁴⁷⁰So treated it worked out in this fashion:

⁴⁷¹.M .ERE ..E SL.NE.

⁴⁷²"Now the first letter can only be A, which is a most useful discovery, since it occurs no fewer than three times in this short sentence, and the H is also apparent in the second word. ⁴⁷³Now it becomes:—

⁴⁷⁴AM HERE A.E SLANE.

⁴⁷⁵Or, filling in the obvious vacancies in the name:—

⁴⁷⁶AM HERE ABE SLANEY.

⁴⁷⁷I had so many letters now that I could proceed with considerable confidence to the second message, which worked out in this fashion:—

⁴⁷⁸A. ELRIES.

⁴⁷⁹Here I could only make sense by putting T and G for the missing letters, and supposing that the name was that of some house or inn at which the writer was staying."

⁴⁸⁰Inspector Martin and I had listened with the utmost interest to the full and clear account of how my friend had produced results which had led to so complete a command over our difficulties.

⁴⁸¹"What did you do then, sir?" asked the inspector.

⁴⁸²"I had every reason to suppose that this Abe Slaney was an American, since Abe is an American contraction, and since a letter from America had been the starting-point of all the trouble. ⁴⁸³I had also every cause to think that there was some criminal secret in the matter. ⁴⁸⁴The lady's allusions to her past and her refusal to take her husband into her confidence both pointed in that direction. ⁴⁸⁵I therefore cabled to my friend, Wilson Hargreave, of the New York Police Bureau, who has more than once made use of my knowledge of London crime. ⁴⁸⁶I asked him whether the name of Abe Slaney was known to him. ⁴⁸⁷Here is his reply: 'The most dangerous crook in Chicago.' ⁴⁸⁸On the very evening upon which I

had his answer Hilton Cubitt sent me the last message from Slaney. ⁴⁸⁹Working with known letters it took this form:—

⁴⁹⁰ELSIE .RE.ARE TO MEET THY GO.

⁴⁹¹The addition of a P and a D completed a message which showed me that the rascal was proceeding from persuasion to threats, and my knowledge of the crooks of Chicago prepared me to find that he might very rapidly put his words into action. ⁴⁹²I at once came to Norfolk with my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, but, unhappily, only in time to find that the worst had already occurred.”

⁴⁹³“It is a privilege to be associated with you in the handling of a case,” said the inspector, warmly. ⁴⁹⁴“You will excuse me, however, if I speak frankly to you. ⁴⁹⁵You are only answerable to yourself, but I have to answer to my superiors. ⁴⁹⁶If this Abe Slaney, living at Elrige's, is indeed the murderer, and if he has made his escape while I am seated here, I should certainly get into serious trouble.”

⁴⁹⁷“You need not be uneasy. ⁴⁹⁸He will not try to escape.”

⁴⁹⁹“How do you know?”

⁵⁰⁰“To fly would be a confession of guilt.”

⁵⁰¹“Then let us go to arrest him.”

⁵⁰²“I expect him here every instant.”

⁵⁰³“But why should he come?”

⁵⁰⁴“Because I have written and asked him.”

⁵⁰⁵“But this is incredible, Mr. Holmes! ⁵⁰⁶Why should he come because you have asked him? ⁵⁰⁷Would not such a request rather rouse his suspicions and cause him to fly?”

⁵⁰⁸“I think I have known how to frame the letter,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁵⁰⁹“In fact, if I am not very much mistaken, here is the gentleman himself coming up the drive.”

⁵¹⁰A man was striding up the path which led to the door. ⁵¹¹He was a tall, handsome, swarthy fellow, clad in a suit of grey flannel, with a Panama hat, a bristling black beard, and a great, aggressive hooked nose, and flourishing a cane as he walked. ⁵¹²He swaggered up the path as if the place belonged to him, and we heard his loud, confident peal at the bell.

⁵¹³“I think, gentlemen,” said Holmes, quietly, “that we had best take up our position behind the door. ⁵¹⁴Every precaution is necessary when dealing with such a fellow. ⁵¹⁵You will need your handcuffs, inspector. ⁵¹⁶You can leave the talking to me.”

⁵¹⁷We waited in silence for a minute—one of those minutes which one can never forget. ⁵¹⁸Then the door opened and the man stepped in. ⁵¹⁹In an instant Holmes clapped a pistol to his head and Martin slipped the handcuffs over his wrists. ⁵²⁰It was all done so swiftly and deftly that the fellow was helpless before he knew that he was attacked. ⁵²¹He glared from one to the other of us with a pair of blazing black eyes. ⁵²²Then he burst into a bitter laugh.

⁵²³“Well, gentlemen, you have the drop on me this time. ⁵²⁴I seem to have knocked up against something hard. ⁵²⁵But I came here in answer to a letter from Mrs. Hilton Cubitt. ⁵²⁶Don't tell me that she is in this? ⁵²⁷Don't tell me that she helped to set a trap for me?”

⁵²⁸“Mrs. Hilton Cubitt was seriously injured and is at death's door.”

⁵²⁹The man gave a hoarse cry of grief which rang through the house.

⁵³⁰“You're crazy!” he cried, fiercely. ⁵³¹“It was he that was hurt, not she. ⁵³²Who would have hurt little Elsie? ⁵³³I may have threatened her, God forgive me, but I would not have touched a hair of her pretty head. ⁵³⁴Take it back—you! ⁵³⁵Say that she is not hurt!”

⁵³⁶“She was found badly wounded by the side of her dead husband.”

⁵³⁷He sank with a deep groan on to the settee and buried his face in his manacled hands. ⁵³⁸For five minutes he was silent. ⁵³⁹Then he raised his face once more, and spoke with the cold composure of despair.

⁵⁴⁰“I have nothing to hide from you, gentlemen,” said he. ⁵⁴¹“If I shot the man he had his shot at me, and there's no murder in that. ⁵⁴²But if you think I could have hurt that woman, then you don't know either me or her. ⁵⁴³I tell you there was never a man in this world loved a woman more than I loved her. ⁵⁴⁴I had a right to her. ⁵⁴⁵She was pledged to me years ago. ⁵⁴⁶Who was this Englishman that he should come between us? ⁵⁴⁷I tell you that I had the first right to her, and that I was only claiming my own.”

⁵⁴⁸“She broke away from your influence when she found the man that you are,” said Holmes, sternly. ⁵⁴⁹“She fled from America to avoid you, and she married an honourable gentleman in England. ⁵⁵⁰You dogged her and followed her and made her life a misery to her in order to induce her to abandon the husband whom she loved and respected in order to fly with you, whom she feared and hated. ⁵⁵¹You have ended by bringing about the death of a noble man and driving his wife to suicide. ⁵⁵²That is your record in this business, Mr. Abe Slaney, and you will answer for it to the law.”

⁵⁵³“If Elsie dies I care nothing what becomes of me,” said the American. ⁵⁵⁴He opened one of his hands and looked at a note crumpled up in his palm. ⁵⁵⁵“See here, mister,” he cried, with a gleam of suspicion in his eyes, “you're not trying to scare me over this, are you? ⁵⁵⁶If the lady is hurt as bad as you say, who was it that wrote this note?” ⁵⁵⁷He tossed it forwards on to the table.

⁵⁵⁸“I wrote it to bring you here.”

⁵⁵⁹“You wrote it? ⁵⁶⁰There was no one on earth outside the Joint who knew the secret of the dancing men. ⁵⁶¹How came you to write it?”

⁵⁶²“What one man can invent another can discover,” said Holmes. ⁵⁶³“There is a cab coming to convey you to Norwich, Mr. Slaney. ⁵⁶⁴But, meanwhile, you have time to make some small reparation for the injury you have wrought. ⁵⁶⁵Are you aware that Mrs. Hilton Cubitt has herself lain under grave suspicion of the murder of her husband, and that it was only my presence here and the knowledge which I happened to possess which has saved her from the accusation? ⁵⁶⁶The least that you owe her is to make it clear to the whole world that she was in no way, directly or indirectly, responsible for his tragic end.”

⁵⁶⁷“I ask nothing better,” said the American. ⁵⁶⁸“I guess the very best case I can make for myself is the absolute naked truth.”

⁵⁶⁹“It is my duty to warn you that it will be used against you,” cried the inspector, with the magnificent fair-play of the British criminal law.

⁵⁷⁰Slaney shrugged his shoulders.

⁵⁷¹“I'll chance that,” said he. ⁵⁷²“First of all, I want you gentlemen to understand that I have known this lady since she was a child. ⁵⁷³There were seven of us in a gang in Chicago, and Elsie's father was the boss of the Joint. ⁵⁷⁴He was a clever man, was old Patrick. ⁵⁷⁵It was he who invented that writing, which would pass as a child's scrawl unless you just happened to have the key to it. ⁵⁷⁶Well, Elsie learned some of our ways; but she couldn't stand the business, and she had a bit of honest money of her own, so she gave us all the slip and got away to London. ⁵⁷⁷She had been engaged to me, and she would have married me, I believe, if I had taken over another profession; but she would have nothing to do with anything on the cross. ⁵⁷⁸It was only after her marriage to this Englishman that I was able to find out where she

was. ⁵⁷⁹I wrote to her, but got no answer. ⁵⁸⁰After that I came over, and, as letters were no use, I put my messages where she could read them.

⁵⁸¹“Well, I have been here a month now. ⁵⁸²I lived in that farm, where I had a room down below, and could get in and out every night, and no one the wiser. ⁵⁸³I tried all I could to coax Elsie away. ⁵⁸⁴I knew that she read the messages, for once she wrote an answer under one of them. ⁵⁸⁵Then my temper got the better of me, and I began to threaten her. ⁵⁸⁶She sent me a letter then, imploring me to go away and saying that it would break her heart if any scandal should come upon her husband. ⁵⁸⁷She said that she would come down when her husband was asleep at three in the morning, and speak with me through the end window, if I would go away afterwards and leave her in peace. ⁵⁸⁸She came down and brought money with her, trying to bribe me to go. ⁵⁸⁹This made me mad, and I caught her arm and tried to pull her through the window. ⁵⁹⁰At that moment in rushed the husband with his revolver in his hand. ⁵⁹¹Elsie had sunk down upon the floor, and we were face to face. ⁵⁹²I was heeled also, and I held up my gun to scare him off and let me get away. ⁵⁹³He fired and missed me. ⁵⁹⁴I pulled off almost at the same instant, and down he dropped. ⁵⁹⁵I made away across the garden, and as I went I heard the window shut behind me. ⁵⁹⁶That's God's truth, gentlemen, every word of it, and I heard no more about it until that lad came riding up with a note which made me walk in here, like a jay, and give myself into your hands.”

⁵⁹⁷A cab had driven up whilst the American had been talking. ⁵⁹⁸Two uniformed policemen sat inside. ⁵⁹⁹Inspector Martin rose and touched his prisoner on the shoulder.

⁶⁰⁰“It is time for us to go.”

⁶⁰¹“Can I see her first?”

⁶⁰²“No, she is not conscious. ⁶⁰³Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I only hope that if ever again I have an important case I shall have the good fortune to have you by my side.”

⁶⁰⁴We stood at the window and watched the cab drive away. ⁶⁰⁵As I turned back my eye caught the pellet of paper which the prisoner had tossed upon the table. ⁶⁰⁶It was the note with which Holmes had decoyed him.

⁶⁰⁷“See if you can read it, Watson,” said he, with a smile.

⁶⁰⁸It contained no word, but this little line of dancing men:—

⁶⁰⁹[Dancing Men Image Nine]



⁶¹⁰“If you use the code which I have explained,” said Holmes, “you will find that it simply means ‘Come here at once.’ ⁶¹¹I was convinced that it was an invitation which he would not refuse, since he could never imagine that it could come from anyone but the lady. ⁶¹²And so, my dear Watson, we have ended by turning the dancing men to good when they have so often been the agents of evil, and I think that I have fulfilled my promise of giving you something unusual for your note-book. ⁶¹³Three-forty is our train, and I fancy we should be back in Baker Street for dinner.”

⁶¹⁴Only one word of epilogue. ⁶¹⁵The American, Abe Slaney, was condemned to death at the winter assizes at Norwich; but his penalty was changed to penal servitude in consideration of mitigating circumstances, and the certainty that Hilton Cubitt had fired the first shot. ⁶¹⁶Of Mrs. Hilton Cubitt I

only know that I have heard she recovered entirely, and that she still remains a widow, devoting her whole life to the care of the poor and to the administration of her husband's estate.

The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist

¹From the years 1894 to 1901 inclusive Mr. Sherlock Holmes was a very busy man. ²It is safe to say that there was no public case of any difficulty in which he was not consulted during those eight years, and there were hundreds of private cases, some of them of the most intricate and extraordinary character, in which he played a prominent part. ³Many startling successes and a few unavoidable failures were the outcome of this long period of continuous work. ⁴As I have preserved very full notes of all these cases, and was myself personally engaged in many of them, it may be imagined that it is no easy task to know which I should select to lay before the public. ⁵I shall, however, preserve my former rule, and give the preference to those cases which derive their interest not so much from the brutality of the crime as from the ingenuity and dramatic quality of the solution. ⁶For this reason I will now lay before the reader the facts connected with Miss Violet Smith, the solitary cyclist of Charlington, and the curious sequel of our investigation, which culminated in unexpected tragedy. ⁷It is true that the circumstances did not admit of any striking illustration of those powers for which my friend was famous, but there were some points about the case which made it stand out in those long records of crime from which I gather the material for these little narratives.

⁸On referring to my note-book for the year 1895 I find that it was upon Saturday, the 23rd of April, that we first heard of Miss Violet Smith. ⁹Her visit was, I remember, extremely unwelcome to Holmes, for he was immersed at the moment in a very abstruse and complicated problem concerning the peculiar persecution to which John Vincent Harden, the well-known tobacco millionaire, had been subjected. ¹⁰My friend, who loved above all things precision and concentration of thought, resented anything which distracted his attention from the matter in hand. ¹¹And yet without a harshness which was foreign to his nature it was impossible to refuse to listen to the story of the young and beautiful woman, tall, graceful, and queenly, who presented herself at Baker Street late in the evening and implored his assistance and advice. ¹²It was vain to urge that his time was already fully occupied, for the young lady had come with the determination to tell her story, and it was evident that nothing short of force could get her out of the room until she had done so. ¹³With a resigned air and a somewhat weary smile, Holmes begged the beautiful intruder to take a seat and to inform us what it was that was troubling her.

¹⁴“At least it cannot be your health,” said he, as his keen eyes darted over her; “so ardent a bicyclist must be full of energy.”

¹⁵She glanced down in surprise at her own feet, and I observed the slight roughening of the side of the sole caused by the friction of the edge of the pedal.

¹⁶“Yes, I bicycle a good deal, Mr. Holmes, and that has something to do with my visit to you to-day.”

¹⁷My friend took the lady's ungloved hand and examined it with as close an attention and as little sentiment as a scientist would show to a specimen.

¹⁸“You will excuse me, I am sure. ¹⁹It is my business,” said he, as he dropped it. ²⁰“I nearly fell into the error of supposing that you were typewriting. ²¹Of course, it is obvious that it is music. ²²You observe the spatulate finger-end, Watson, which is common to both professions? ²³There is a spirituality about the face, however”—he gently turned it towards the light—“which the typewriter does not generate. ²⁴This lady is a musician.”

²⁵“Yes, Mr. Holmes, I teach music.”

²⁶“In the country, I presume, from your complexion.”

²⁷“Yes, sir; near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey.”

²⁸“A beautiful neighbourhood and full of the most interesting associations. ²⁹You remember, Watson, that it was near there that we took Archie Stamford, the forger. ³⁰Now, Miss Violet, what has happened to you near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey?”

³¹The young lady, with great clearness and composure, made the following curious statement:—

³²“My father is dead, Mr. Holmes. ³³He was James Smith, who conducted the orchestra at the old Imperial Theatre. ³⁴My mother and I were left without a relation in the world except one uncle, Ralph Smith, who went to Africa twenty-five years ago, and we have never had a word from him since. ³⁵When father died we were left very poor, but one day we were told that there was an advertisement in the Times inquiring for our whereabouts. ³⁶You can imagine how excited we were, for we thought that someone had left us a fortune. ³⁷We went at once to the lawyer whose name was given in the paper. ³⁸There we met two gentlemen, Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Woodley, who were home on a visit from South Africa. ³⁹They said that my uncle was a friend of theirs, that he died some months before in great poverty in Johannesburg, and that he had asked them with his last breath to hunt up his relations and see that they were in no want. ⁴⁰It seemed strange to us that Uncle Ralph, who took no notice of us when he was alive, should be so careful to look after us when he was dead; but Mr. Carruthers explained that the reason was that my uncle had just heard of the death of his brother, and so felt responsible for our fate.”

⁴¹“Excuse me,” said Holmes; “when was this interview?”

⁴²“Last December—four months ago.”

⁴³“Pray proceed.”

⁴⁴“Mr. Woodley seemed to me to be a most odious person. ⁴⁵He was for ever making eyes at me—a coarse, puffy-faced, red-moustached young man, with his hair plastered down on each side of his forehead. ⁴⁶I thought that he was perfectly hateful—and I was sure that Cyril would not wish me to know such a person.”

⁴⁷“Oh, Cyril is his name!” said Holmes, smiling.

⁴⁸The young lady blushed and laughed.

⁴⁹“Yes, Mr. Holmes; Cyril Morton, an electrical engineer, and we hope to be married at the end of the summer. ⁵⁰Dear me, how did I get talking about him? ⁵¹What I wished to say was that Mr. Woodley was perfectly odious, but that Mr. Carruthers, who was a much older man, was more agreeable. ⁵²He was a dark, sallow, clean-shaven, silent person; but he had polite manners and a pleasant smile. ⁵³He inquired how we were left, and on finding that we were very poor he suggested that I should come and teach music to his only daughter, aged ten. ⁵⁴I said that I did not like to leave my mother, on which he suggested that I should go home to her every week-end, and he offered me a hundred a year, which was certainly splendid pay. ⁵⁵So it ended by my accepting, and I went down to Chiltern Grange, about six miles from Farnham. ⁵⁶Mr. Carruthers was a widower, but he had engaged a lady-housekeeper, a very respectable, elderly person, called Mrs. Dixon, to look after his establishment. ⁵⁷The child was a dear, and everything promised well. ⁵⁸Mr. Carruthers was very kind and very musical, and we had most pleasant evenings together. ⁵⁹Every week-end I went home to my mother in town.

⁶⁰“The first flaw in my happiness was the arrival of the red-moustached Mr. Woodley. ⁶¹He came for a visit of a week, and oh, it seemed three months to me! ⁶²He was a dreadful person, a bully to everyone else, but to me something infinitely worse. ⁶³He made odious love to me, boasted of his wealth, said that if I married him I would have the finest diamonds in London, and finally, when I would have nothing to do with him, he seized me in his arms one day after dinner—he was hideously strong—and he swore that he would not let me go until I had kissed him. ⁶⁴Mr. Carruthers came in and tore him off from me, on which he turned upon his own host, knocking him down and cutting his face open. ⁶⁵That

was the end of his visit, as you can imagine. ⁶⁶Mr. Carruthers apologized to me next day, and assured me that I should never be exposed to such an insult again. ⁶⁷I have not seen Mr. Woodley since.

⁶⁸“And now, Mr. Holmes, I come at last to the special thing which has caused me to ask your advice to-day. ⁶⁹You must know that every Saturday forenoon I ride on my bicycle to Farnham Station in order to get the 12.22 to town. ⁷⁰The road from Chiltern Grange is a lonely one, and at one spot it is particularly so, for it lies for over a mile between Charlington Heath upon one side and the woods which lie round Charlington Hall upon the other. ⁷¹You could not find a more lonely tract of road anywhere, and it is quite rare to meet so much as a cart, or a peasant, until you reach the high road near Crooksbury Hill. ⁷²Two weeks ago I was passing this place when I chanced to look back over my shoulder, and about two hundred yards behind me I saw a man, also on a bicycle. ⁷³He seemed to be a middle-aged man, with a short, dark beard. ⁷⁴I looked back before I reached Farnham, but the man was gone, so I thought no more about it. ⁷⁵But you can imagine how surprised I was, Mr. Holmes, when on my return on the Monday I saw the same man on the same stretch of road. ⁷⁶My astonishment was increased when the incident occurred again, exactly as before, on the following Saturday and Monday. ⁷⁷He always kept his distance and did not molest me in any way, but still it certainly was very odd. ⁷⁸I mentioned it to Mr. Carruthers, who seemed interested in what I said, and told me that he had ordered a horse and trap, so that in future I should not pass over these lonely roads without some companion.

⁷⁹“The horse and trap were to have come this week, but for some reason they were not delivered, and again I had to cycle to the station. ⁸⁰That was this morning. ⁸¹You can think that I looked out when I came to Charlington Heath, and there, sure enough, was the man, exactly as he had been the two weeks before. ⁸²He always kept so far from me that I could not clearly see his face, but it was certainly someone whom I did not know. ⁸³He was dressed in a dark suit with a cloth cap. ⁸⁴The only thing about his face that I could clearly see was his dark beard. ⁸⁵To-day I was not alarmed, but I was filled with curiosity, and I determined to find out who he was and what he wanted. ⁸⁶I slowed down my machine, but he slowed down his. ⁸⁷Then I stopped altogether, but he stopped also. ⁸⁸Then I laid a trap for him. ⁸⁹There is a sharp turning of the road, and I pedalled very quickly round this, and then I stopped and waited. ⁹⁰I expected him to shoot round and pass me before he could stop. ⁹¹But he never appeared. ⁹²Then I went back and looked round the corner. ⁹³I could see a mile of road, but he was not on it. ⁹⁴To make it the more extraordinary, there was no side road at this point down which he could have gone.”

⁹⁵Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands. ⁹⁶“This case certainly presents some features of its own,” said he. ⁹⁷“How much time elapsed between your turning the corner and your discovery that the road was clear?”

⁹⁸“Two or three minutes.”

⁹⁹“Then he could not have retreated down the road, and you say that there are no side roads?”

¹⁰⁰“None.”

¹⁰¹“Then he certainly took a footpath on one side or the other.”

¹⁰²“It could not have been on the side of the heath or I should have seen him.”

¹⁰³“So by the process of exclusion we arrive at the fact that he made his way towards Charlington Hall, which, as I understand, is situated in its own grounds on one side of the road. ¹⁰⁴Anything else?”

¹⁰⁵“Nothing, Mr. Holmes, save that I was so perplexed that I felt I should not be happy until I had seen you and had your advice.”

¹⁰⁶Holmes sat in silence for some little time.

¹⁰⁷“Where is the gentleman to whom you are engaged?” he asked, at last.

¹⁰⁸“He is in the Midland Electrical Company, at Coventry.”

¹⁰⁹“He would not pay you a surprise visit?”

¹¹⁰“Oh, Mr. Holmes! ¹¹¹As if I should not know him!”

¹¹²“Have you had any other admirers?”

¹¹³“Several before I knew Cyril.”

¹¹⁴“And since?”

¹¹⁵“There was this dreadful man, Woodley, if you can call him an admirer.”

¹¹⁶“No one else?”

¹¹⁷Our fair client seemed a little confused.

¹¹⁸“Who was he?” asked Holmes.

¹¹⁹“Oh, it may be a mere fancy of mine; but it has seemed to me sometimes that my employer, Mr. Carruthers, takes a great deal of interest in me. ¹²⁰We are thrown rather together. ¹²¹I play his accompaniments in the evening. ¹²²He has never said anything. ¹²³He is a perfect gentleman. ¹²⁴But a girl always knows.”

¹²⁵“Ha!” Holmes looked grave. ¹²⁶“What does he do for a living?”

¹²⁷“He is a rich man.”

¹²⁸“No carriages or horses?”

¹²⁹“Well, at least he is fairly well-to-do. ¹³⁰But he goes into the City two or three times a week. ¹³¹He is deeply interested in South African gold shares.”

¹³²“You will let me know any fresh development, Miss Smith. ¹³³I am very busy just now, but I will find time to make some inquiries into your case. ¹³⁴In the meantime take no step without letting me know. ¹³⁵Good-bye, and I trust that we shall have nothing but good news from you.”

¹³⁶“It is part of the settled order of Nature that such a girl should have followers,” said Holmes, as he pulled at his meditative pipe, “but for choice not on bicycles in lonely country roads. ¹³⁷Some secretive lover, beyond all doubt. ¹³⁸But there are curious and suggestive details about the case, Watson.”

¹³⁹“That he should appear only at that point?”

¹⁴⁰“Exactly. ¹⁴¹Our first effort must be to find who are the tenants of Charlington Hall. ¹⁴²Then, again, how about the connection between Carruthers and Woodley, since they appear to be men of such a different type? ¹⁴³How came they both to be so keen upon looking up Ralph Smith's relations? ¹⁴⁴One more point. ¹⁴⁵What sort of a menage is it which pays double the market price for a governess, but does not keep a horse although six miles from the station? ¹⁴⁶Odd, Watson—very odd!”

¹⁴⁷“You will go down?”

¹⁴⁸“No, my dear fellow, you will go down. ¹⁴⁹This may be some trifling intrigue, and I cannot break my other important research for the sake of it. ¹⁵⁰On Monday you will arrive early at Farnham; you will conceal yourself near Charlington Heath; you will observe these facts for yourself, and act as your own judgment advises. ¹⁵¹Then, having inquired as to the occupants of the Hall, you will come back to me and report. ¹⁵²And now, Watson, not another word of the matter until we have a few solid stepping-stones on which we may hope to get across to our solution.”

¹⁵³We had ascertained from the lady that she went down upon the Monday by the train which leaves Waterloo at 9.50, so I started early and caught the 9.13. ¹⁵⁴At Farnham Station I had no difficulty in being directed to Charlington Heath. ¹⁵⁵It was impossible to mistake the scene of the young lady's adventure, for the road runs between the open heath on one side and an old yew hedge upon the other, surrounding a park which is studded with magnificent trees. ¹⁵⁶There was a main gateway of lichen-studded stone, each side pillar surmounted by mouldering heraldic emblems; but besides this central carriage drive I observed several points where there were gaps in the hedge and paths leading through them. ¹⁵⁷The house was invisible from the road, but the surroundings all spoke of gloom and decay.

¹⁵⁸The heath was covered with golden patches of flowering gorse, gleaming magnificently in the light of the bright spring sunshine. ¹⁵⁹Behind one of these clumps I took up my position, so as to command both the gateway of the Hall and a long stretch of the road upon either side. ¹⁶⁰It had been deserted when I left it, but now I saw a cyclist riding down it from the opposite direction to that in which I had come. ¹⁶¹He was clad in a dark suit, and I saw that he had a black beard. ¹⁶²On reaching the end of the Charlington grounds he sprang from his machine and led it through a gap in the hedge, disappearing from my view.

¹⁶³A quarter of an hour passed and then a second cyclist appeared. ¹⁶⁴This time it was the young lady coming from the station. ¹⁶⁵I saw her look about her as she came to the Charlington hedge. ¹⁶⁶An instant later the man emerged from his hiding-place, sprang upon his cycle, and followed her. ¹⁶⁷In all the broad landscape those were the only moving figures, the graceful girl sitting very straight upon her machine, and the man behind her bending low over his handle-bar, with a curiously furtive suggestion in every movement. ¹⁶⁸She looked back at him and slowed her pace. ¹⁶⁹He slowed also. ¹⁷⁰She stopped. ¹⁷¹He at once stopped too, keeping two hundred yards behind her. ¹⁷²Her next movement was as unexpected as it was spirited. ¹⁷³She suddenly whisked her wheels round and dashed straight at him! ¹⁷⁴He was as quick as she, however, and darted off in desperate flight. ¹⁷⁵Presently she came back up the road again, her head haughtily in the air, not deigning to take any further notice of her silent attendant. ¹⁷⁶He had turned also, and still kept his distance until the curve of the road hid them from my sight.

¹⁷⁷I remained in my hiding-place, and it was well that I did so, for presently the man reappeared cycling slowly back. ¹⁷⁸He turned in at the Hall gates and dismounted from his machine. ¹⁷⁹For some few minutes I could see him standing among the trees. ¹⁸⁰His hands were raised and he seemed to be settling his necktie. ¹⁸¹Then he mounted his cycle and rode away from me down the drive towards the Hall. ¹⁸²I ran across the heath and peered through the trees. ¹⁸³Far away I could catch glimpses of the old grey building with its bristling Tudor chimneys, but the drive ran through a dense shrubbery, and I saw no more of my man.

¹⁸⁴However, it seemed to me that I had done a fairly good morning's work, and I walked back in high spirits to Farnham. ¹⁸⁵The local house-agent could tell me nothing about Charlington Hall, and referred me to a well-known firm in Pall Mall. ¹⁸⁶There I halted on my way home, and met with courtesy from the representative. ¹⁸⁷No, I could not have Charlington Hall for the summer. ¹⁸⁸I was just too late. ¹⁸⁹It had been let about a month ago. ¹⁹⁰Mr. Williamson was the name of the tenant. ¹⁹¹He was a respectable elderly gentleman. ¹⁹²The polite agent was afraid he could say no more, as the affairs of his clients were not matters which he could discuss.

¹⁹³Mr. Sherlock Holmes listened with attention to the long report which I was able to present to him that evening, but it did not elicit that word of curt praise which I had hoped for and should have valued. ¹⁹⁴On the contrary, his austere face was even more severe than usual as he commented upon the things that I had done and the things that I had not.

¹⁹⁵"Your hiding-place, my dear Watson, was very faulty. ¹⁹⁶You should have been behind the hedge; then you would have had a close view of this interesting person. ¹⁹⁷As it is you were some hundreds of yards away, and can tell me even less than Miss Smith. ¹⁹⁸She thinks she does not know the man; I am

convinced she does. ¹⁹⁹Why, otherwise, should he be so desperately anxious that she should not get so near him as to see his features? ²⁰⁰You describe him as bending over the handle-bar. ²⁰¹Concealment again, you see. ²⁰²You really have done remarkably badly. ²⁰³He returns to the house and you want to find out who he is. ²⁰⁴You come to a London house-agent!"

²⁰⁵"What should I have done?" I cried, with some heat.

²⁰⁶"Gone to the nearest public-house. ²⁰⁷That is the centre of country gossip. ²⁰⁸They would have told you every name, from the master to the scullery-maid. ²⁰⁹Williamson! ²¹⁰It conveys nothing to my mind. ²¹¹If he is an elderly man he is not this active cyclist who sprints away from that athletic young lady's pursuit. ²¹²What have we gained by your expedition? ²¹³The knowledge that the girl's story is true. ²¹⁴I never doubted it. ²¹⁵That there is a connection between the cyclist and the Hall. ²¹⁶I never doubted that either. ²¹⁷That the Hall is tenanted by Williamson. ²¹⁸Who's the better for that? ²¹⁹Well, well, my dear sir, don't look so depressed. ²²⁰We can do little more until next Saturday, and in the meantime I may make one or two inquiries myself."

²²¹Next morning we had a note from Miss Smith, recounting shortly and accurately the very incidents which I had seen, but the pith of the letter lay in the postscript:

²²²"I am sure that you will respect my confidence, Mr. Holmes, when I tell you that my place here has become difficult owing to the fact that my employer has proposed marriage to me. ²²³I am convinced that his feelings are most deep and most honourable. ²²⁴At the same time my promise is, of course, given. ²²⁵He took my refusal very seriously, but also very gently. ²²⁶You can understand, however, that the situation is a little strained."

²²⁷"Our young friend seems to be getting into deep waters," said Holmes, thoughtfully, as he finished the letter. ²²⁸"The case certainly presents more features of interest and more possibility of development than I had originally thought. ²²⁹I should be none the worse for a quiet, peaceful day in the country, and I am inclined to run down this afternoon and test one or two theories which I have formed."

²³⁰Holmes's quiet day in the country had a singular termination, for he arrived at Baker Street late in the evening with a cut lip and a discoloured lump upon his forehead, besides a general air of dissipation which would have made his own person the fitting object of a Scotland Yard investigation. ²³¹He was immensely tickled by his own adventures, and laughed heartily as he recounted them.

²³²"I get so little active exercise that it is always a treat," said he. ²³³"You are aware that I have some proficiency in the good old British sport of boxing. ²³⁴Occasionally it is of service. ²³⁵To-day, for example, I should have come to very ignominious grief without it."

²³⁶I begged him to tell me what had occurred.

²³⁷"I found that country pub which I had already recommended to your notice, and there I made my discreet inquiries. ²³⁸I was in the bar, and a garrulous landlord was giving me all that I wanted. ²³⁹Williamson is a white-bearded man, and he lives alone with a small staff of servants at the Hall. ²⁴⁰There is some rumour that he is or has been a clergyman; but one or two incidents of his short residence at the Hall struck me as peculiarly unecclesiastical. ²⁴¹I have already made some inquiries at a clerical agency, and they tell me that there was a man of that name in orders whose career has been a singularly dark one. ²⁴²The landlord further informed me that there are usually week-end visitors—'a warm lot, sir'—at the Hall, and especially one gentleman with a red moustache, Mr. Woodley by name, who was always there. ²⁴³We had got as far as this when who should walk in but the gentleman himself, who had been drinking his beer in the tap-room and had heard the whole conversation. ²⁴⁴Who was I? ²⁴⁵What did I want? ²⁴⁶What did I mean by asking questions? ²⁴⁷He had a fine flow of language, and his adjectives were very vigorous. ²⁴⁸He ended a string of abuse by a vicious back-hander which I failed to entirely avoid. ²⁴⁹The next few minutes were delicious. ²⁵⁰It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian.

²⁵¹I emerged as you see me. ²⁵²Mr. Woodley went home in a cart. ²⁵³So ended my country trip, and it must be confessed that, however enjoyable, my day on the Surrey border has not been much more profitable than your own."

²⁵⁴The Thursday brought us another letter from our client.

²⁵⁵You will not be surprised, Mr. Holmes [said she] to hear that I am leaving Mr. Carruthers's employment. ²⁵⁶Even the high pay cannot reconcile me to the discomforts of my situation. ²⁵⁷On Saturday I come up to town and I do not intend to return. ²⁵⁸Mr. Carruthers has got a trap, and so the dangers of the lonely road, if there ever were any dangers, are now over.

²⁵⁹As to the special cause of my leaving, it is not merely the strained situation with Mr. Carruthers, but it is the reappearance of that odious man, Mr. Woodley. ²⁶⁰He was always hideous, but he looks more awful than ever now, for he appears to have had an accident and he is much disfigured. ²⁶¹I saw him out of the window, but I am glad to say I did not meet him. ²⁶²He had a long talk with Mr. Carruthers, who seemed much excited afterwards. ²⁶³Woodley must be staying in the neighbourhood, for he did not sleep here, and yet I caught a glimpse of him again this morning slinking about in the shrubbery. ²⁶⁴I would sooner have a savage wild animal loose about the place. ²⁶⁵I loathe and fear him more than I can say. ²⁶⁶How can Mr. Carruthers endure such a creature for a moment? ²⁶⁷However, all my troubles will be over on Saturday.

²⁶⁸"So I trust, Watson; so I trust," said Holmes, gravely. ²⁶⁹"There is some deep intrigue going on round that little woman, and it is our duty to see that no one molests her upon that last journey. ²⁷⁰I think, Watson, that we must spare time to run down together on Saturday morning, and make sure that this curious and inconclusive investigation has no untoward ending."

²⁷¹I confess that I had not up to now taken a very serious view of the case, which had seemed to me rather grotesque and bizarre than dangerous. ²⁷²That a man should lie in wait for and follow a very handsome woman is no unheard-of thing, and if he had so little audacity that he not only dared not address her, but even fled from her approach, he was not a very formidable assailant. ²⁷³The ruffian Woodley was a very different person, but, except on one occasion, he had not molested our client, and now he visited the house of Carruthers without intruding upon her presence. ²⁷⁴The man on the bicycle was doubtless a member of those week-end parties at the Hall of which the publican had spoken; but who he was or what he wanted was as obscure as ever. ²⁷⁵It was the severity of Holmes's manner and the fact that he slipped a revolver into his pocket before leaving our rooms which impressed me with the feeling that tragedy might prove to lurk behind this curious train of events.

²⁷⁶A rainy night had been followed by a glorious morning, and the heath-covered country-side with the glowing clumps of flowering gorse seemed all the more beautiful to eyes which were weary of the duns and drabs and slate-greys of London. ²⁷⁷Holmes and I walked along the broad, sandy road inhaling the fresh morning air, and rejoicing in the music of the birds and the fresh breath of the spring. ²⁷⁸From a rise of the road on the shoulder of Crooksbury Hill we could see the grim Hall bristling out from amidst the ancient oaks, which, old as they were, were still younger than the building which they surrounded. ²⁷⁹Holmes pointed down the long tract of road which wound, a reddish yellow band, between the brown of the heath and the budding green of the woods. ²⁸⁰Far away, a black dot, we could see a vehicle moving in our direction. ²⁸¹Holmes gave an exclamation of impatience.

²⁸²"I had given a margin of half an hour," said he. ²⁸³"If that is her trap she must be making for the earlier train. ²⁸⁴I fear, Watson, that she will be past Charlington before we can possibly meet her."

²⁸⁵From the instant that we passed the rise we could no longer see the vehicle, but we hastened onwards at such a pace that my sedentary life began to tell upon me, and I was compelled to fall behind. ²⁸⁶Holmes, however, was always in training, for he had inexhaustible stores of nervous energy upon which to draw. ²⁸⁷His springy step never slowed until suddenly, when he was a hundred yards in front

of me, he halted, and I saw him throw up his hand with a gesture of grief and despair. ²⁸⁸At the same instant an empty dog-cart, the horse cantering, the reins trailing, appeared round the curve of the road and rattled swiftly towards us.

²⁸⁹“Too late, Watson; too late!” cried Holmes, as I ran panting to his side. ²⁹⁰“Fool that I was not to allow for that earlier train! ²⁹¹It's abduction, Watson—abduction! ²⁹²Murder! ²⁹³Heaven knows what! ²⁹⁴Block the road! ²⁹⁵Stop the horse! ²⁹⁶That's right. ²⁹⁷Now, jump in, and let us see if I can repair the consequences of my own blunder.”

²⁹⁸We had sprung into the dog-cart, and Holmes, after turning the horse, gave it a sharp cut with the whip, and we flew back along the road. ²⁹⁹As we turned the curve the whole stretch of road between the Hall and the heath was opened up. ³⁰⁰I grasped Holmes's arm.

³⁰¹“That's the man!” I gasped.

³⁰²A solitary cyclist was coming towards us. ³⁰³His head was down and his shoulders rounded as he put every ounce of energy that he possessed on to the pedals. ³⁰⁴He was flying like a racer. ³⁰⁵Suddenly he raised his bearded face, saw us close to him, and pulled up, springing from his machine. ³⁰⁶That coal-black beard was in singular contrast to the pallor of his face, and his eyes were as bright as if he had a fever. ³⁰⁷He stared at us and at the dog-cart. ³⁰⁸Then a look of amazement came over his face.

³⁰⁹“Halloa! ³¹⁰Stop there!” he shouted, holding his bicycle to block our road. ³¹¹“Where did you get that dog-cart? ³¹²Pull up, man!” he yelled, drawing a pistol from his side pocket. ³¹³“Pull up, I say, or, by George, I'll put a bullet into your horse.”

³¹⁴Holmes threw the reins into my lap and sprang down from the cart.

³¹⁵“You're the man we want to see. ³¹⁶Where is Miss Violet Smith?” he said, in his quick, clear way.

³¹⁷“That's what I am asking you. ³¹⁸You're in her dog-cart. ³¹⁹You ought to know where she is.”

³²⁰“We met the dog-cart on the road. ³²¹There was no one in it. ³²²We drove back to help the young lady.”

³²³“Good Lord! ³²⁴Good Lord! what shall I do?” cried the stranger, in an ecstasy of despair. ³²⁵“They've got her, that hellhound Woodley and the blackguard parson. ³²⁶Come, man, come, if you really are her friend. ³²⁷Stand by me and we'll save her, if I have to leave my carcass in Charlington Wood.”

³²⁸He ran distractedly, his pistol in his hand, towards a gap in the hedge. ³²⁹Holmes followed him, and I, leaving the horse grazing beside the road, followed Holmes.

³³⁰“This is where they came through,” said he, pointing to the marks of several feet upon the muddy path. ³³¹“Halloa! ³³²Stop a minute! ³³³Who's this in the bush?”

³³⁴It was a young fellow about seventeen, dressed like an ostler, with leather cords and gaiters. ³³⁵He lay upon his back, his knees drawn up, a terrible cut upon his head. ³³⁶He was insensible, but alive. ³³⁷A glance at his wound told me that it had not penetrated the bone.

³³⁸“That's Peter, the groom,” cried the stranger. ³³⁹“He drove her. ³⁴⁰The beasts have pulled him off and clubbed him. ³⁴¹Let him lie; we can't do him any good, but we may save her from the worst fate that can befall a woman.”

³⁴²We ran frantically down the path, which wound among the trees. ³⁴³We had reached the shrubbery which surrounded the house when Holmes pulled up.

³⁴⁴“They didn't go to the house. ³⁴⁵Here are their marks on the left—here, beside the laurel bushes!

³⁴⁶Ah, I said so!”

³⁴⁷As he spoke a woman's shrill scream—a scream which vibrated with a frenzy of horror—burst from the thick green clump of bushes in front of us. ³⁴⁸It ended suddenly on its highest note with a choke and a gurgle.

³⁴⁹“This way! ³⁵⁰This way! ³⁵¹They are in the bowling alley,” cried the stranger, darting through the bushes. ³⁵²“Ah, the cowardly dogs! ³⁵³Follow me, gentlemen! ³⁵⁴Too late! too late! by the living Jingo!”

³⁵⁵We had broken suddenly into a lovely glade of greensward surrounded by ancient trees. ³⁵⁶On the farther side of it, under the shadow of a mighty oak, there stood a singular group of three people. ³⁵⁷One was a woman, our client, drooping and faint, a handkerchief round her mouth. ³⁵⁸Opposite her stood a brutal, heavy-faced, red-moustached young man, his gaitered legs parted wide, one arm akimbo, the other waving a riding-crop, his whole attitude suggestive of triumphant bravado. ³⁵⁹Between them an elderly, grey-bearded man, wearing a short surplice over a light tweed suit, had evidently just completed the wedding service, for he pocketed his prayer-book as we appeared and slapped the sinister bridegroom upon the back in jovial congratulation.

³⁶⁰“They're married!” I gasped.

³⁶¹“Come on!” cried our guide; “come on!” ³⁶²He rushed across the glade, Holmes and I at his heels. ³⁶³As we approached, the lady staggered against the trunk of the tree for support. ³⁶⁴Williamson, the ex-clergyman, bowed to us with mock politeness, and the bully Woodley advanced with a shout of brutal and exultant laughter.

³⁶⁵“You can take your beard off, Bob,” said he. “I know you right enough. ³⁶⁶Well, you and your pals have just come in time for me to be able to introduce you to Mrs. Woodley.”

³⁶⁷Our guide's answer was a singular one. ³⁶⁸He snatched off the dark beard which had disguised him and threw it on the ground, disclosing a long, sallow, clean-shaven face below it. ³⁶⁹Then he raised his revolver and covered the young ruffian, who was advancing upon him with his dangerous riding-crop swinging in his hand.

³⁷⁰“Yes,” said our ally, “I am Bob Carruthers, and I'll see this woman righted if I have to swing for it. ³⁷¹I told you what I'd do if you molested her, and, by the Lord, I'll be as good as my word!”

³⁷²“You're too late. ³⁷³She's my wife!”

³⁷⁴“No, she's your widow.”

³⁷⁵His revolver cracked, and I saw the blood spurt from the front of Woodley's waistcoat. ³⁷⁶He spun round with a scream and fell upon his back, his hideous red face turning suddenly to a dreadful mottled pallor. ³⁷⁷The old man, still clad in his surplice, burst into such a string of foul oaths as I have never heard, and pulled out a revolver of his own, but before he could raise it he was looking down the barrel of Holmes's weapon.

³⁷⁸“Enough of this,” said my friend, coldly. ³⁷⁹“Drop that pistol! ³⁸⁰Watson, pick it up! ³⁸¹Hold it to his head! ³⁸²Thank you. ³⁸³You, Carruthers, give me that revolver. ³⁸⁴We'll have no more violence. ³⁸⁵Come, hand it over!”

³⁸⁶“Who are you, then?”

³⁸⁷“My name is Sherlock Holmes.”

³⁸⁸“Good Lord!”

³⁸⁹“You have heard of me, I see. ³⁹⁰I will represent the official police until their arrival. ³⁹¹Here, you!” he shouted to a frightened groom who had appeared at the edge of the glade. ³⁹²“Come here. ³⁹³Take this note as hard as you can ride to Farnham.” ³⁹⁴He scribbled a few words upon a leaf from his note-

book. ³⁹⁵“Give it to the superintendent at the police-station. ³⁹⁶Until he comes I must detain you all under my personal custody.”

³⁹⁷The strong, masterful personality of Holmes dominated the tragic scene, and all were equally puppets in his hands. ³⁹⁸Williamson and Carruthers found themselves carrying the wounded Woodley into the house, and I gave my arm to the frightened girl. ³⁹⁹The injured man was laid on his bed, and at Holmes's request I examined him. ⁴⁰⁰I carried my report to where he sat in the old tapestry-hung dining-room with his two prisoners before him.

⁴⁰¹“He will live,” said I.

⁴⁰²“What!” cried Carruthers, springing out of his chair. ⁴⁰³“I'll go upstairs and finish him first. ⁴⁰⁴Do you tell me that that girl, that angel, is to be tied to Roaring Jack Woodley for life?”

⁴⁰⁵“You need not concern yourself about that,” said Holmes. ⁴⁰⁶“There are two very good reasons why she should under no circumstances be his wife. ⁴⁰⁷In the first place, we are very safe in questioning Mr. Williamson's right to solemnize a marriage.”

⁴⁰⁸“I have been ordained,” cried the old rascal.

⁴⁰⁹“And also unfrocked.”

⁴¹⁰“Once a clergyman, always a clergyman.”

⁴¹¹“I think not. ⁴¹²How about the license?”

⁴¹³“We had a license for the marriage. ⁴¹⁴I have it here in my pocket.”

⁴¹⁵“Then you got it by a trick. ⁴¹⁶But in any case a forced marriage is no marriage, but it is a very serious felony, as you will discover before you have finished. ⁴¹⁷You'll have time to think the point out during the next ten years or so, unless I am mistaken. ⁴¹⁸As to you, Carruthers, you would have done better to keep your pistol in your pocket.”

⁴¹⁹“I begin to think so, Mr. Holmes; but when I thought of all the precaution I had taken to shield this girl—for I loved her, Mr. Holmes, and it is the only time that ever I knew what love was—it fairly drove me mad to think that she was in the power of the greatest brute and bully in South Africa, a man whose name is a holy terror from Kimberley to Johannesburg. ⁴²⁰Why, Mr. Holmes, you'll hardly believe it, but ever since that girl has been in my employment I never once let her go past this house, where I knew these rascals were lurking, without following her on my bicycle just to see that she came to no harm. ⁴²¹I kept my distance from her, and I wore a beard so that she should not recognise me, for she is a good and high-spirited girl, and she wouldn't have stayed in my employment long if she had thought that I was following her about the country roads.”

⁴²²“Why didn't you tell her of her danger?”

⁴²³“Because then, again, she would have left me, and I couldn't bear to face that. ⁴²⁴Even if she couldn't love me it was a great deal to me just to see her dainty form about the house, and to hear the sound of her voice.”

⁴²⁵“Well,” said I, “you call that love, Mr. Carruthers, but I should call it selfishness.”

⁴²⁶“Maybe the two things go together. ⁴²⁷Anyhow, I couldn't let her go. ⁴²⁸Besides, with this crowd about, it was well that she should have someone near to look after her. ⁴²⁹Then when the cable came I knew they were bound to make a move.”

⁴³⁰“What cable?”

⁴³¹Carruthers took a telegram from his pocket.

⁴³²“That's it,” said he.

⁴³³It was short and concise:

⁴³⁴The old man is dead.

⁴³⁵“Hum!” said Holmes. ⁴³⁶“I think I see how things worked, and I can understand how this message would, as you say, bring them to a head. ⁴³⁷But while we wait you might tell me what you can.”

⁴³⁸The old reprobate with the surplice burst into a volley of bad language.

⁴³⁹“By Heaven,” said he, “if you squeal on us, Bob Carruthers, I'll serve you as you served Jack Woodley. ⁴⁴⁰You can bleat about the girl to your heart's content, for that's your own affair, but if you round on your pals to this plain-clothes copper it will be the worst day's work that ever you did.”

⁴⁴¹“Your reverence need not be excited,” said Holmes, lighting a cigarette. ⁴⁴²“The case is clear enough against you, and all I ask is a few details for my private curiosity. ⁴⁴³However, if there's any difficulty in your telling me I'll do the talking, and then you will see how far you have a chance of holding back your secrets. ⁴⁴⁴In the first place, three of you came from South Africa on this game—you Williamson, you Carruthers, and Woodley.”

⁴⁴⁵“Lie number one,” said the old man; “I never saw either of them until two months ago, and I have never been in Africa in my life, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Busybody Holmes!”

⁴⁴⁶“What he says is true,” said Carruthers.

⁴⁴⁷“Well, well, two of you came over. ⁴⁴⁸His reverence is our own home-made article. ⁴⁴⁹You had known Ralph Smith in South Africa. ⁴⁵⁰You had reason to believe he would not live long. ⁴⁵¹You found out that his niece would inherit his fortune. ⁴⁵²How's that—eh?”

⁴⁵³Carruthers nodded and Williamson swore.

⁴⁵⁴“She was next-of-kin, no doubt, and you were aware that the old fellow would make no will.”

⁴⁵⁵“Couldn't read or write,” said Carruthers.

⁴⁵⁶“So you came over, the two of you, and hunted up the girl. ⁴⁵⁷The idea was that one of you was to marry her and the other have a share of the plunder. ⁴⁵⁸For some reason Woodley was chosen as the husband. ⁴⁵⁹Why was that?”

⁴⁶⁰“We played cards for her on the voyage. ⁴⁶¹He won.”

⁴⁶²“I see. ⁴⁶³You got the young lady into your service, and there Woodley was to do the courting. ⁴⁶⁴She recognised the drunken brute that he was, and would have nothing to do with him. ⁴⁶⁵Meanwhile, your arrangement was rather upset by the fact that you had yourself fallen in love with the lady. ⁴⁶⁶You could no longer bear the idea of this ruffian owning her.”

⁴⁶⁷“No, by George, I couldn't!”

⁴⁶⁸“There was a quarrel between you. ⁴⁶⁹He left you in a rage, and began to make his own plans independently of you.”

⁴⁷⁰“It strikes me, Williamson, there isn't very much that we can tell this gentleman,” cried Carruthers, with a bitter laugh. ⁴⁷¹“Yes, we quarreled, and he knocked me down. ⁴⁷²I am level with him on that, anyhow. ⁴⁷³Then I lost sight of him. ⁴⁷⁴That was when he picked up with this cast padre here. ⁴⁷⁵I found that they had set up house-keeping together at this place on the line that she had to pass for the station. ⁴⁷⁶I kept my eye on her after that, for I knew there was some devilry in the wind. ⁴⁷⁷I saw them from time to time, for I was anxious to know what they were after. ⁴⁷⁸Two days ago Woodley came up to my

house with this cable, which showed that Ralph Smith was dead. ⁴⁴³He asked me if I would stand by the bargain. ⁴⁴⁴I said I would not. ⁴⁴⁵He asked me if I would marry the girl myself and give him a share. ⁴⁴⁶I said I would willingly do so, but that she would not have me. ⁴⁴⁷He said, 'Let us get her married first, and after a week or two she may see things a bit different.' ⁴⁴⁸I said I would have nothing to do with violence. ⁴⁴⁹So he went off cursing, like the foul-mouthed blackguard that he was, and swearing that he would have her yet. ⁴⁵⁰She was leaving me this week-end, and I had got a trap to take her to the station, but I was so uneasy in my mind that I followed her on my bicycle. ⁴⁵¹She had got a start, however, and before I could catch her the mischief was done. ⁵²The first thing I knew about it was when I saw you two gentlemen driving back in her dog-cart."

⁴⁵³Holmes rose and tossed the end of his cigarette into the grate. ⁴⁵⁴"I have been very obtuse, Watson," said he. ⁴⁵⁵"When in your report you said that you had seen the cyclist as you thought arrange his necktie in the shrubbery, that alone should have told me all. ⁴⁵⁶However, we may congratulate ourselves upon a curious and in some respects a unique case. ⁴⁵⁷I perceive three of the county constabulary in the drive, and I am glad to see that the little ostler is able to keep pace with them; so it is likely that neither he nor the interesting bridegroom will be permanently damaged by their morning's adventures. ⁴⁵⁸I think, Watson, that in your medical capacity you might wait upon Miss Smith and tell her that if she is sufficiently recovered we shall be happy to escort her to her mother's home. ⁴⁵⁹If she is not quite convalescent you will find that a hint that we were about to telegraph to a young electrician in the Midlands would probably complete the cure. ⁴⁶⁰As to you, Mr. Carruthers, I think that you have done what you could to make amends for your share in an evil plot. ⁴⁶¹There is my card, sir, and if my evidence can be of help to you in your trial it shall be at your disposal."

⁴⁶²In the whirl of our incessant activity it has often been difficult for me, as the reader has probably observed, to round off my narratives, and to give those final details which the curious might expect. ⁴⁶³Each case has been the prelude to another, and the crisis once over the actors have passed for ever out of our busy lives. ⁴⁶⁴I find, however, a short note at the end of my manuscripts dealing with this case, in which I have put it upon record that Miss Violet Smith did indeed inherit a large fortune, and that she is now the wife of Cyril Morton, the senior partner of Morton & Kennedy, the famous Westminster electricians. ⁴⁶⁵Williamson and Woodley were both tried for abduction and assault, the former getting seven years and the latter ten. ⁴⁶⁶Of the fate of Carruthers I have no record, but I am sure that his assault was not viewed very gravely by the Court, since Woodley had the reputation of being a most dangerous ruffian, and I think that a few months were sufficient to satisfy the demands of justice.

The Adventure of the Priory School

¹We have had some dramatic entrances and exits upon our small stage at Baker Street, but I cannot recollect anything more sudden and startling than the first appearance of Thorneycroft Huxtable, M.A., Ph.D., etc. ²His card, which seemed too small to carry the weight of his academic distinctions, preceded him by a few seconds, and then he entered himself—so large, so pompous, and so dignified that he was the very embodiment of self-possession and solidity. ³And yet his first action when the door had closed behind him was to stagger against the table, whence he slipped down upon the floor, and there was that majestic figure prostrate and insensible upon our bearskin hearthrug.

⁴We had sprung to our feet, and for a few moments we stared in silent amazement at this ponderous piece of wreckage, which told of some sudden and fatal storm far out on the ocean of life. ⁵Then Holmes hurried with a cushion for his head and I with brandy for his lips. ⁶The heavy white face was seamed with lines of trouble, the hanging pouches under the closed eyes were leaden in colour, the loose mouth drooped dolorously at the corners, the rolling chins were unshaven. ⁷Collar and shirt bore the grime of a long journey, and the hair bristled unkempt from the well-shaped head. ⁸It was a sorely-stricken man who lay before us.

⁹“What is it, Watson?” asked Holmes.

¹⁰“Absolute exhaustion—possibly mere hunger and fatigue,” said I, with my finger on the thready pulse, where the stream of life trickled thin and small.

¹¹“Return ticket from Mackleton, in the North of England,” said Holmes, drawing it from the watch-pocket. ¹²“It is not twelve o'clock yet. ¹³He has certainly been an early starter.”

¹⁴The puckered eyelids had begun to quiver, and now a pair of vacant, grey eyes looked up at us. ¹⁵An instant later the man had scrambled on to his feet, his face crimson with shame.

¹⁶“Forgive this weakness, Mr. Holmes; I have been a little overwrought. ¹⁷Thank you, if I might have a glass of milk and a biscuit I have no doubt that I should be better. ¹⁸I came personally, Mr. Holmes, in order to ensure that you would return with me. ¹⁹I feared that no telegram would convince you of the absolute urgency of the case.”

²⁰“When you are quite restored—

²¹“I am quite well again. ²²I cannot imagine how I came to be so weak. ²³I wish you, Mr. Holmes, to come to Mackleton with me by the next train.”

²⁴My friend shook his head.

²⁵“My colleague, Dr. Watson, could tell you that we are very busy at present. ²⁶I am retained in this case of the Ferrers Documents, and the Abergavenny murder is coming up for trial. ²⁷Only a very important issue could call me from London at present.”

²⁸“Important!” ²⁹Our visitor threw up his hands. ³⁰“Have you heard nothing of the abduction of the only son of the Duke of Holderness?”

³¹“What! the late Cabinet Minister?”

³²“Exactly. ³³We had tried to keep it out of the papers, but there was some rumour in the Globe last night. ³⁴I thought it might have reached your ears.”

³⁵Holmes shot out his long, thin arm and picked out Volume “H” in his encyclopaedia of reference.

³⁶“Holdernes, 6th Duke, K.G., P.C.’—half the alphabet! ³⁷Baron Beverley, Earl of Carston’—dear me, what a list! ³⁸Lord Lieutenant of Hallamshire since 1900. ³⁹Married Edith, daughter of Sir Charles Appledore, 1888. ⁴⁰Heir and only child, Lord Saltire. ⁴¹Owens about two hundred and fifty thousand acres. ⁴²Minerals in Lancashire and Wales. ⁴³Address: Carlton House Terrace; Holdernes Hall, Hallamshire; Carston Castle, Bangor, Wales. ⁴⁴Lord of the Admiralty, 1872; Chief Secretary of State for—’ ⁴⁵Well, well, this man is certainly one of the greatest subjects of the Crown!”

⁴⁶“The greatest and perhaps the wealthiest. ⁴⁷I am aware, Mr. Holmes, that you take a very high line in professional matters, and that you are prepared to work for the work's sake. ⁴⁸I may tell you, however, that his Grace has already intimated that a cheque for five thousand pounds will be handed over to the person who can tell him where his son is, and another thousand to him who can name the man, or men, who have taken him.”

⁴⁹“It is a princely offer,” said Holmes. ⁵⁰“Watson, I think that we shall accompany Dr. Huxtable back to the North of England. ⁵¹And now, Dr. Huxtable, when you have consumed that milk you will kindly tell me what has happened, when it happened, how it happened, and, finally, what Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, of the Priory School, near Mackleton, has to do with the matter, and why he comes three days after an event—the state of your chin gives the date—to ask for my humble services.”

⁵²Our visitor had consumed his milk and biscuits. ⁵³The light had come back to his eyes and the colour to his cheeks as he set himself with great vigour and lucidity to explain the situation.

⁵⁴“I must inform you, gentlemen, that the Priory is a preparatory school, of which I am the founder and principal. ⁵⁵‘Huxtable's Sidelights on Horace’ may possibly recall my name to your memories. ⁵⁶The Priory is, without exception, the best and most select preparatory school in England. ⁵⁷Lord Leverstoke, the Earl of Blackwater, Sir Cathcart Soames—they all have entrusted their sons to me. ⁵⁸But I felt that my school had reached its zenith when, three weeks ago, the Duke of Holdernes sent Mr. James Wilder, his secretary, with the intimation that young Lord Saltire, ten years old, his only son and heir, was about to be committed to my charge. ⁵⁹Little did I think that this would be the prelude to the most crushing misfortune of my life.

⁶⁰“On May 1st the boy arrived, that being the beginning of the summer term. ⁶¹He was a charming youth, and he soon fell into our ways. ⁶²I may tell you—I trust that I am not indiscreet, but half-confidences are absurd in such a case—that he was not entirely happy at home. ⁶³It is an open secret that the Duke's married life had not been a peaceful one, and the matter had ended in a separation by mutual consent, the Duchess taking up her residence in the South of France. ⁶⁴This had occurred very shortly before, and the boy's sympathies are known to have been strongly with his mother. ⁶⁵He moped after her departure from Holdernes Hall, and it was for this reason that the Duke desired to send him to my establishment. ⁶⁶In a fortnight the boy was quite at home with us, and was apparently absolutely happy.

⁶⁷“He was last seen on the night of May 13th—that is, the night of last Monday. ⁶⁸His room was on the second floor, and was approached through another larger room in which two boys were sleeping. ⁶⁹These boys saw and heard nothing, so that it is certain that young Saltire did not pass out that way. ⁷⁰His window was open, and there is a stout ivy plant leading to the ground. ⁷¹We could trace no footmarks below, but it is sure that this is the only possible exit.

⁷²“His absence was discovered at seven o'clock on Tuesday morning. ⁷³His bed had been slept in. ⁷⁴He had dressed himself fully before going off in his usual school suit of black Eton jacket and dark grey trousers. ⁷⁵There were no signs that anyone had entered the room, and it is quite certain that anything in the nature of cries, or a struggle, would have been heard, since Caunter, the elder boy in the inner room, is a very light sleeper.

⁷⁶“When Lord Saltire's disappearance was discovered I at once called a roll of the whole establishment, boys, masters, and servants. ⁷⁷It was then that we ascertained that Lord Saltire had not been alone in his flight. ⁷⁸Heidegger, the German master, was missing. ⁷⁹His room was on the second floor, at the farther end of the building, facing the same way as Lord Saltire's. ⁸⁰His bed had also been slept in; but he had apparently gone away partly dressed, since his shirt and socks were lying on the floor. ⁸¹He had undoubtedly let himself down by the ivy, for we could see the marks of his feet where he had landed on the lawn. ⁸²His bicycle was kept in a small shed beside this lawn, and it also was gone.

⁸³“He had been with me for two years, and came with the best references; but he was a silent, morose man, not very popular either with masters or boys. ⁸⁴No trace could be found of the fugitives, and now on Thursday morning we are as ignorant as we were on Tuesday. ⁸⁵Inquiry was, of course, made at once at Holderness Hall. ⁸⁶It is only a few miles away, and we imagined that in some sudden attack of homesickness he had gone back to his father; but nothing had been heard of him. ⁸⁷The Duke is greatly agitated—and as to me, you have seen yourselves the state of nervous prostration to which the suspense and the responsibility have reduced me. ⁸⁸Mr. Holmes, if ever you put forward your full powers, I implore you to do so now, for never in your life could you have a case which is more worthy of them.”

⁸⁹Sherlock Holmes had listened with the utmost intentness to the statement of the unhappy schoolmaster. ⁹⁰His drawn brows and the deep furrow between them showed that he needed no exhortation to concentrate all his attention upon a problem which, apart from the tremendous interests involved, must appeal so directly to his love of the complex and the unusual. ⁹¹He now drew out his note-book and jotted down one or two memoranda.

⁹²“You have been very remiss in not coming to me sooner,” said he, severely. ⁹³“You start me on my investigation with a very serious handicap. ⁹⁴It is inconceivable, for example, that this ivy and this lawn would have yielded nothing to an expert observer.”

⁹⁵“I am not to blame, Mr. Holmes. ⁹⁶His Grace was extremely desirous to avoid all public scandal. ⁹⁷He was afraid of his family unhappiness being dragged before the world. ⁹⁸He has a deep horror of anything of the kind.”

⁹⁹“But there has been some official investigation?”

¹⁰⁰“Yes, sir, and it has proved most disappointing. ¹⁰¹An apparent clue was at once obtained, since a boy and a young man were reported to have been seen leaving a neighbouring station by an early train. ¹⁰²Only last night we had news that the couple had been hunted down in Liverpool, and they prove to have no connection whatever with the matter in hand. ¹⁰³Then it was that in my despair and disappointment, after a sleepless night, I came straight to you by the early train.”

¹⁰⁴“I suppose the local investigation was relaxed while this false clue was being followed up?”

¹⁰⁵“It was entirely dropped.”

¹⁰⁶“So that three days have been wasted. ¹⁰⁷The affair has been most deplorably handled.”

¹⁰⁸“I feel it, and admit it.”

¹⁰⁹“And yet the problem should be capable of ultimate solution. ¹¹⁰I shall be very happy to look into it.

¹¹¹Have you been able to trace any connection between the missing boy and this German master?”

¹¹²“None at all.”

¹¹³“Was he in the master's class?”

¹¹⁴“No; he never exchanged a word with him so far as I know.”

¹¹⁵“That is certainly very singular. ¹¹⁶Had the boy a bicycle?”

¹¹⁷“No.”

¹¹⁸“Was any other bicycle missing?”

¹¹⁹“No.”

¹²⁰“Is that certain?”

¹²¹“Quite.”

¹²²“Well, now, you do not mean to seriously suggest that this German rode off upon a bicycle in the dead of the night bearing the boy in his arms?”

¹²³“Certainly not.”

¹²⁴“Then what is the theory in your mind?”

¹²⁵“The bicycle may have been a blind. ¹²⁶It may have been hidden somewhere and the pair gone off on foot.”

¹²⁷“Quite so; but it seems rather an absurd blind, does it not? ¹²⁸Were there other bicycles in this shed?”

¹²⁹“Several.”

¹³⁰“Would he not have hidden a couple he desired to give the idea that they had gone off upon them?”

¹³¹“I suppose he would.”

¹³²“Of course he would. ¹³³The blind theory won't do. ¹³⁴But the incident is an admirable starting-point for an investigation. ¹³⁵After all, a bicycle is not an easy thing to conceal or to destroy. ¹³⁶One other question. ¹³⁷Did anyone call to see the boy on the day before he disappeared?”

¹³⁸“No.”

¹³⁹“Did he get any letters?”

¹⁴⁰“Yes; one letter.”

¹⁴¹“From whom?”

¹⁴²“From his father.”

¹⁴³“Do you open the boys' letters?”

¹⁴⁴“No.”

¹⁴⁵“How do you know it was from the father?”

¹⁴⁶“The coat of arms was on the envelope, and it was addressed in the Duke's peculiar stiff hand. ¹⁴⁷Besides, the Duke remembers having written.”

¹⁴⁸“When had he a letter before that?”

¹⁴⁹“Not for several days.”

¹⁵⁰“Had he ever one from France?”

¹⁵¹“No; never.”

¹⁵²“You see the point of my questions, of course. ¹⁵³Either the boy was carried off by force or he went of his own free will. ¹⁵⁴In the latter case you would expect that some prompting from outside would be

needed to make so young a lad do such a thing. ¹⁵⁵If he has had no visitors, that prompting must have come in letters. ¹⁵⁶Hence I try to find out who were his correspondents.”

¹⁵⁷“I fear I cannot help you much. ¹⁵⁸His only correspondent, so far as I know, was his own father.”

¹⁵⁹“Who wrote to him on the very day of his disappearance. ¹⁶⁰Were the relations between father and son very friendly?”

¹⁶¹“His Grace is never very friendly with anyone. ¹⁶²He is completely immersed in large public questions, and is rather inaccessible to all ordinary emotions. ¹⁶³But he was always kind to the boy in his own way.”

¹⁶⁴“But the sympathies of the latter were with the mother?”

¹⁶⁵“Yes.”

¹⁶⁶“Did he say so?”

¹⁶⁷“No.”

¹⁶⁸“The Duke, then?”

¹⁶⁹“Good heavens, no!”

¹⁷⁰“Then how could you know?”

¹⁷¹“I have had some confidential talks with Mr. James Wilder, his Grace's secretary. ¹⁷²It was he who gave me the information about Lord Saltire's feelings.”

¹⁷³“I see. ¹⁷⁴By the way, that last letter of the Duke's—was it found in the boy's room after he was gone?”

¹⁷⁵“No; he had taken it with him. ¹⁷⁶I think, Mr. Holmes, it is time that we were leaving for Euston.”

¹⁷⁷“I will order a four-wheeler. ¹⁷⁸In a quarter of an hour we shall be at your service. ¹⁷⁹If you are telegraphing home, Mr. Huxtable, it would be well to allow the people in your neighbourhood to imagine that the inquiry is still going on in Liverpool, or wherever else that red herring led your pack. ¹⁸⁰In the meantime I will do a little quiet work at your own doors, and perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of it.”

¹⁸¹That evening found us in the cold, bracing atmosphere of the Peak country, in which Dr. Huxtable's famous school is situated. ¹⁸²It was already dark when we reached it. ¹⁸³A card was lying on the hall table, and the butler whispered something to his master, who turned to us with agitation in every heavy feature.

¹⁸⁴“The Duke is here,” said he. ¹⁸⁵“The Duke and Mr. Wilder are in the study. ¹⁸⁶Come, gentlemen, and I will introduce you.”

¹⁸⁷I was, of course, familiar with the pictures of the famous statesman, but the man himself was very different from his representation. ¹⁸⁸He was a tall and stately person, scrupulously dressed, with a drawn, thin face, and a nose which was grotesquely curved and long. ¹⁸⁹His complexion was of a dead pallor, which was more startling by contrast with a long, dwindling beard of vivid red, which flowed down over his white waistcoat, with his watch-chain gleaming through its fringe. ¹⁹⁰Such was the stately presence who looked stonily at us from the centre of Dr. Huxtable's hearthrug. ¹⁹¹Beside him stood a very young man, whom I understood to be Wilder, the private secretary. ¹⁹²He was small, nervous, alert, with intelligent, light-blue eyes and mobile features. ¹⁹³It was he who at once, in an incisive and positive tone, opened the conversation.

¹⁹⁴“I called this morning, Dr. Huxtable, too late to prevent you from starting for London. ¹⁹⁵I learned that your object was to invite Mr. Sherlock Holmes to undertake the conduct of this case. ¹⁹⁶His Grace is surprised, Dr. Huxtable, that you should have taken such a step without consulting him.”

¹⁹⁷“When I learned that the police had failed—”

¹⁹⁸“His Grace is by no means convinced that the police have failed.”

¹⁹⁹“But surely, Mr. Wilder—”

²⁰⁰“You are well aware, Dr. Huxtable, that his Grace is particularly anxious to avoid all public scandal.

²⁰¹He prefers to take as few people as possible into his confidence.”

²⁰²“The matter can be easily remedied,” said the brow-beaten doctor; “Mr. Sherlock Holmes can return to London by the morning train.”

²⁰³“Hardly that, Doctor, hardly that,” said Holmes, in his blandest voice. ²⁰⁴“This northern air is invigorating and pleasant, so I propose to spend a few days upon your moors, and to occupy my mind as best I may. ²⁰⁵Whether I have the shelter of your roof or of the village inn is, of course, for you to decide.”

²⁰⁶I could see that the unfortunate doctor was in the last stage of indecision, from which he was rescued by the deep, sonorous voice of the red-bearded Duke, which boomed out like a dinner-gong.

²⁰⁷“I agree with Mr. Wilder, Dr. Huxtable, that you would have done wisely to consult me. ²⁰⁸But since Mr. Holmes has already been taken into your confidence, it would indeed be absurd that we should not avail ourselves of his services. ²⁰⁹Far from going to the inn, Mr. Holmes, I should be pleased if you would come and stay with me at Holderness Hall.”

²¹⁰“I thank your Grace. ²¹¹For the purposes of my investigation I think that it would be wiser for me to remain at the scene of the mystery.”

²¹²“Just as you like, Mr. Holmes. ²¹³Any information which Mr. Wilder or I can give you is, of course, at your disposal.”

²¹⁴“It will probably be necessary for me to see you at the Hall,” said Holmes. ²¹⁵“I would only ask you now, sir, whether you have formed any explanation in your own mind as to the mysterious disappearance of your son?”

²¹⁶“No, sir, I have not.”

²¹⁷“Excuse me if I allude to that which is painful to you, but I have no alternative. ²¹⁸Do you think that the Duchess had anything to do with the matter?”

²¹⁹The great Minister showed perceptible hesitation.

²²⁰“I do not think so,” he said, at last.

²²¹“The other most obvious explanation is that the child has been kidnapped for the purpose of levying ransom. ²²²You have not had any demand of the sort?”

²²³“No, sir.”

²²⁴“One more question, your Grace. ²²⁵I understand that you wrote to your son upon the day when this incident occurred.”

²²⁶“No; I wrote upon the day before.”

²²⁷“Exactly. ²²⁸But he received it on that day?”

²²⁹“Yes.”

²³⁰“Was there anything in your letter which might have unbalanced him or induced him to take such a step?”

²³¹“No, sir, certainly not.”

²³²“Did you post that letter yourself?”

²³³The nobleman's reply was interrupted by his secretary, who broke in with some heat.

²³⁴“His Grace is not in the habit of posting letters himself,” said he. ²³⁵“This letter was laid with others upon the study table, and I myself put them in the post-bag.”

²³⁶“You are sure this one was among them?”

²³⁷“Yes; I observed it.”

²³⁸“How many letters did your Grace write that day?”

²³⁹“Twenty or thirty. ²⁴⁰I have a large correspondence. ²⁴¹But surely this is somewhat irrelevant?”

²⁴²“Not entirely,” said Holmes.

²⁴³“For my own part,” the Duke continued, “I have advised the police to turn their attention to the South of France. ²⁴⁴I have already said that I do not believe that the Duchess would encourage so monstrous an action, but the lad had the most wrong-headed opinions, and it is possible that he may have fled to her, aided and abetted by this German. ²⁴⁵I think, Dr. Huxtable, that we will now return to the Hall.”

²⁴⁶I could see that there were other questions which Holmes would have wished to put; but the nobleman's abrupt manner showed that the interview was at an end. ²⁴⁷It was evident that to his intensely aristocratic nature this discussion of his intimate family affairs with a stranger was most abhorrent, and that he feared lest every fresh question would throw a fiercer light into the discreetly shadowed corners of his ducal history.

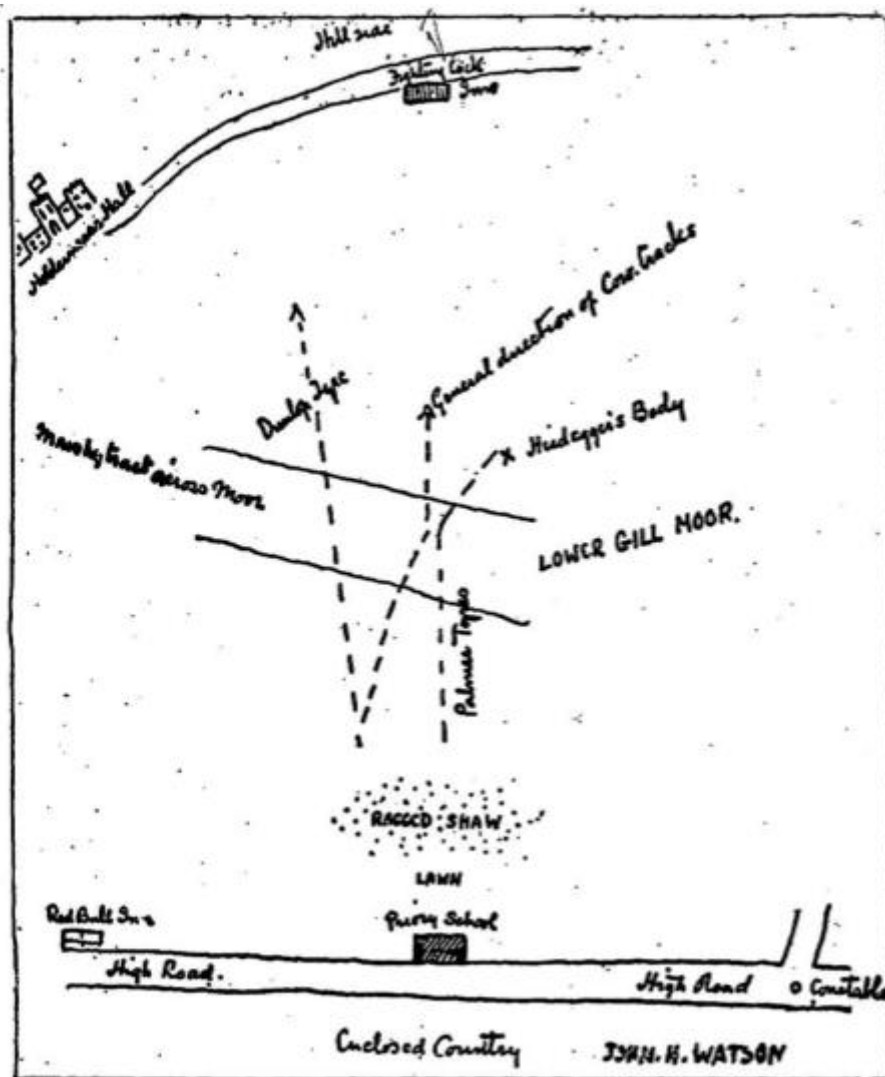
²⁴⁸When the nobleman and his secretary had left, my friend flung himself at once with characteristic eagerness into the investigation.

²⁴⁹The boy's chamber was carefully examined, and yielded nothing save the absolute conviction that it was only through the window that he could have escaped. ²⁵⁰The German master's room and effects gave no further clue. ²⁵¹In his case a trailer of ivy had given way under his weight, and we saw by the light of a lantern the mark on the lawn where his heels had come down. ²⁵²That one dint in the short green grass was the only material witness left of this inexplicable nocturnal flight.

²⁵³Sherlock Holmes left the house alone, and only returned after eleven. ²⁵⁴He had obtained a large ordnance map of the neighbourhood, and this he brought into my room, where he laid it out on the bed, and, having balanced the lamp in the middle of it, he began to smoke over it, and occasionally to point out objects of interest with the reeking amber of his pipe.

²⁵⁵“This case grows upon me, Watson,” said he. ²⁵⁶“There are decidedly some points of interest in connection with it. ²⁵⁷In this early stage I want you to realize those geographical features which may have a good deal to do with our investigation.

²⁵⁸“Look at this map. ²⁵⁹This dark square is the Priory School. ²⁶⁰I'll put a pin in it. ²⁶¹Now, this line is the main road. ²⁶²You see that it runs east and west past the school, and you see also that there is no side road for a mile either way. ²⁶³If these two folk passed away by road it was this road.”



²⁶⁴“Exactly.”

²⁶⁵“By a singular and happy chance we are able to some extent to check what passed along this road during the night in question. ²⁶⁶At this point, where my pipe is now resting, a country constable was on duty from twelve to six. ²⁶⁷It is, as you perceive, the first cross road on the east side. ²⁶⁸This man declares that he was not absent from his post for an instant, and he is positive that neither boy nor man could have gone that way unseen. ²⁶⁹I have spoken with this policeman to-night, and he appears to me to be a perfectly reliable person. ²⁷⁰That blocks this end. ²⁷¹We have now to deal with the other. ²⁷²There is an inn here, the Red Bull, the landlady of which was ill. ²⁷³She had sent to Mackleton for a doctor, but he did not arrive until morning, being absent at another case. ²⁷⁴The people at the inn were alert all night, awaiting his coming, and one or other of them seems to have continually had an eye upon the road. ²⁷⁵They declare that no one passed. ²⁷⁶If their evidence is good, then we are fortunate enough to be able to block the west, and also to be able to say that the fugitives did not use the road at all.”

²⁷⁷“But the bicycle?” I objected.

²⁷⁸“Quite so. ²⁷⁹We will come to the bicycle presently. ²⁸⁰To continue our reasoning: if these people did not go by the road, they must have traversed the country to the north of the house or to the south of the house. ²⁸¹That is certain. ²⁸²Let us weigh the one against the other. ²⁸³On the south of the house is, as you perceive, a large district of arable land, cut up into small fields, with stone walls between them. ²⁸⁴There, I admit that a bicycle is impossible. ²⁸⁵We can dismiss the idea. ²⁸⁶We turn to the country on

the north. ²⁸⁷Here there lies a grove of trees, marked as the 'Ragged Shaw,' and on the farther side stretches a great rolling moor, Lower Gill Moor, extending for ten miles and sloping gradually upwards. ²⁸⁸Here, at one side of this wilderness, is Holderness Hall, ten miles by road, but only six across the moor. ²⁸⁹It is a peculiarly desolate plain. ²⁹⁰A few moor farmers have small holdings, where they rear sheep and cattle. ²⁹¹Except these, the plover and the curlew are the only inhabitants until you come to the Chesterfield high road. ²⁹²There is a church there, you see, a few cottages, and an inn. ²⁹³Beyond that the hills become precipitous. ²⁹⁴Surely it is here to the north that our quest must lie."

²⁹⁵"But the bicycle?" I persisted.

²⁹⁶"Well, well!" said Holmes, impatiently. ²⁹⁷"A good cyclist does not need a high road. ²⁹⁸The moor is intersected with paths and the moon was at the full. ²⁹⁹Halloa! what is this?"

³⁰⁰There was an agitated knock at the door, and an instant afterwards Dr. Huxtable was in the room.

³⁰¹In his hand he held a blue cricket-cap, with a white chevron on the peak.

³⁰²"At last we have a clue!" he cried. ³⁰³"Thank Heaven! at last we are on the dear boy's track! ³⁰⁴It is his cap."

³⁰⁵"Where was it found?"

³⁰⁶"In the van of the gipsies who camped on the moor. ³⁰⁷They left on Tuesday. ³⁰⁸To-day the police traced them down and examined their caravan. ³⁰⁹This was found."

³¹⁰"How do they account for it?"

³¹¹"They shuffled and lied—said that they found it on the moor on Tuesday morning. ³¹²They know where he is, the rascals! ³¹³Thank goodness, they are all safe under lock and key. ³¹⁴Either the fear of the law or the Duke's purse will certainly get out of them all that they know."

³¹⁵"So far, so good," said Holmes, when the doctor had at last left the room. ³¹⁶"It at least bears out the theory that it is on the side of the Lower Gill Moor that we must hope for results. ³¹⁷The police have really done nothing locally, save the arrest of these gipsies. ³¹⁸Look here, Watson! ³¹⁹There is a watercourse across the moor. ³²⁰You see it marked here in the map. ³²¹In some parts it widens into a morass. ³²²This is particularly so in the region between Holderness Hall and the school. ³²³It is vain to look elsewhere for tracks in this dry weather; but at that point there is certainly a chance of some record being left. ³²⁴I will call you early to-morrow morning, and you and I will try if we can throw some little light upon the mystery."

³²⁵The day was just breaking when I woke to find the long, thin form of Holmes by my bedside. ³²⁶He was fully dressed, and had apparently already been out.

³²⁷"I have done the lawn and the bicycle shed," said he. ³²⁸"I have also had a ramble through the Ragged Shaw. ³²⁹Now, Watson, there is cocoa ready in the next room. ³³⁰I must beg you to hurry, for we have a great day before us."

³³¹His eyes shone, and his cheek was flushed with the exhilaration of the master workman who sees his work lie ready before him. ³³²A very different Holmes, this active, alert man, from the introspective and pallid dreamer of Baker Street. ³³³I felt, as I looked upon that supple figure, alive with nervous energy, that it was indeed a strenuous day that awaited us.

³³⁴And yet it opened in the blackest disappointment. ³³⁵With high hopes we struck across the peaty, russet moor, intersected with a thousand sheep paths, until we came to the broad, light-green belt which marked the morass between us and Holderness. ³³⁶Certainly, if the lad had gone homewards, he must have passed this, and he could not pass it without leaving his traces. ³³⁷But no sign of him or the German could be seen. ³³⁸With a darkening face my friend strode along the margin, eagerly observant of every

muddy stain upon the mossy surface. ³³⁹Sheep-marks there were in profusion, and at one place, some miles down, cows had left their tracks. ³⁴⁰Nothing more.

³⁴¹“Check number one,” said Holmes, looking gloomily over the rolling expanse of the moor. ³⁴²“There is another morass down yonder and a narrow neck between. ³⁴³Halloa! halloa! halloa! what have we here?”

³⁴⁴We had come on a small black ribbon of pathway. ³⁴⁵In the middle of it, clearly marked on the sodden soil, was the track of a bicycle.

³⁴⁶“Hurrah!” I cried. ³⁴⁷“We have it.”

³⁴⁸But Holmes was shaking his head, and his face was puzzled and expectant rather than joyous.

³⁴⁹“A bicycle, certainly, but not the bicycle,” said he. ³⁵⁰“I am familiar with forty-two different impressions left by tyres. ³⁵¹This, as you perceive, is a Dunlop, with a patch upon the outer cover. ³⁵²Heidegger's tyres were Palmer's, leaving longitudinal stripes. ³⁵³Aveling, the mathematical master, was sure upon the point. ³⁵⁴Therefore, it is not Heidegger's track.”

³⁵⁵“The boy's, then?”

³⁵⁶“Possibly, if we could prove a bicycle to have been in his possession. ³⁵⁷But this we have utterly failed to do. ³⁵⁸This track, as you perceive, was made by a rider who was going from the direction of the school.”

³⁵⁹“Or towards it?”

³⁶⁰“No, no, my dear Watson. ³⁶¹The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weight rests. ³⁶²You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. ³⁶³It was undoubtedly heading away from the school. ³⁶⁴It may or may not be connected with our inquiry, but we will follow it backwards before we go any farther.”

³⁶⁵We did so, and at the end of a few hundred yards lost the tracks as we emerged from the boggy portion of the moor. ³⁶⁶Following the path backwards, we picked out another spot, where a spring trickled across it. ³⁶⁷Here, once again, was the mark of the bicycle, though nearly obliterated by the hoofs of cows. ³⁶⁸After that there was no sign, but the path ran right on into Ragged Shaw, the wood which backed on to the school. ³⁶⁹From this wood the cycle must have emerged. ³⁷⁰Holmes sat down on a boulder and rested his chin in his hands. ³⁷¹I had smoked two cigarettes before he moved.

³⁷²“Well, well,” said he, at last. ³⁷³“It is, of course, possible that a cunning man might change the tyre of his bicycle in order to leave unfamiliar tracks. ³⁷⁴A criminal who was capable of such a thought is a man whom I should be proud to do business with. ³⁷⁵We will leave this question undecided and hark back to our morass again, for we have left a good deal unexplored.”

³⁷⁶We continued our systematic survey of the edge of the sodden portion of the moor, and soon our perseverance was gloriously rewarded. ³⁷⁷Right across the lower part of the bog lay a miry path. ³⁷⁸Holmes gave a cry of delight as he approached it. ³⁷⁹An impression like a fine bundle of telegraph wires ran down the centre of it. ³⁸⁰It was the Palmer tyre.

³⁸¹“Here is Herr Heidegger, sure enough!” cried Holmes, exultantly. ³⁸²“My reasoning seems to have been pretty sound, Watson.”

³⁸³“I congratulate you.”

³⁸⁴“But we have a long way still to go. ³⁸⁵Kindly walk clear of the path. ³⁸⁶Now let us follow the trail. ³⁸⁷I fear that it will not lead very far.”

³⁸⁸We found, however, as we advanced that this portion of the moor is intersected with soft patches, and, though we frequently lost sight of the track, we always succeeded in picking it up once more.

³⁸⁹“Do you observe,” said Holmes, “that the rider is now undoubtedly forcing the pace? ³⁹⁰There can be no doubt of it. ³⁹¹Look at this impression, where you get both tyres clear. ³⁹²The one is as deep as the other. ³⁹³That can only mean that the rider is throwing his weight on to the handle-bar, as a man does when he is sprinting. ³⁹⁴By Jove! he has had a fall.”

³⁹⁵There was a broad, irregular smudge covering some yards of the track. ³⁹⁶Then there were a few footmarks, and the tyre reappeared once more.

³⁹⁷“A side-slip,” I suggested.

³⁹⁸Holmes held up a crumpled branch of flowering gorse. ³⁹⁹To my horror I perceived that the yellow blossoms were all dabbled with crimson. ⁴⁰⁰On the path, too, and among the heather were dark stains of clotted blood.

⁴⁰¹“Bad!” said Holmes. ⁴⁰²“Bad! Stand clear, Watson! ⁴⁰³Not an unnecessary footstep! ⁴⁰⁴What do I read here? ⁴⁰⁵He fell wounded, he stood up, he remounted, he proceeded. ⁴⁰⁶But there is no other track. ⁴⁰⁷Cattle on this side path. ⁴⁰⁸He was surely not gored by a bull? ⁴⁰⁹Impossible! ⁴¹⁰But I see no traces of anyone else. ⁴¹¹We must push on, Watson. ⁴¹²Surely with stains as well as the track to guide us he cannot escape us now.”

⁴¹³Our search was not a very long one. ⁴¹⁴The tracks of the tyre began to curve fantastically upon the wet and shining path. ⁴¹⁵Suddenly, as I looked ahead, the gleam of metal caught my eye from amid the thick gorse bushes. ⁴¹⁶Out of them we dragged a bicycle, Palmer-tyred, one pedal bent, and the whole front of it horribly smeared and slobbered with blood. ⁴¹⁷On the other side of the bushes a shoe was projecting. ⁴¹⁸We ran round, and there lay the unfortunate rider. ⁴¹⁹He was a tall man, full bearded, with spectacles, one glass of which had been knocked out. ⁴²⁰The cause of his death was a frightful blow upon the head, which had crushed in part of his skull. ⁴²¹That he could have gone on after receiving such an injury said much for the vitality and courage of the man. ⁴²²He wore shoes, but no socks, and his open coat disclosed a night-shirt beneath it. ⁴²³It was undoubtedly the German master.

⁴²⁴Holmes turned the body over reverently, and examined it with great attention. ⁴²⁵He then sat in deep thought for a time, and I could see by his ruffled brow that this grim discovery had not, in his opinion, advanced us much in our inquiry.

⁴²⁶“It is a little difficult to know what to do, Watson,” said he, at last. ⁴²⁷“My own inclinations are to push this inquiry on, for we have already lost so much time that we cannot afford to waste another hour. ⁴²⁸On the other hand, we are bound to inform the police of the discovery, and to see that this poor fellow's body is looked after.”

⁴²⁹“I could take a note back.”

⁴³⁰“But I need your company and assistance. ⁴³¹Wait a bit! ⁴³²There is a fellow cutting peat up yonder. ⁴³³Bring him over here, and he will guide the police.”

⁴³⁴I brought the peasant across, and Holmes dispatched the frightened man with a note to Dr. Huxtable.

⁴³⁵“Now, Watson,” said he, “we have picked up two clues this morning. ⁴³⁶One is the bicycle with the Palmer tyre, and we see what that has led to. ⁴³⁷The other is the bicycle with the patched Dunlop. ⁴³⁸Before we start to investigate that, let us try to realize what we do know so as to make the most of it, and to separate the essential from the accidental.”

⁴³⁹“First of all I wish to impress upon you that the boy certainly left of his own free will. ⁴⁴⁰He got down from his window and he went off, either alone or with someone. ⁴⁴¹That is sure.”

⁴⁴²I assented.

⁴⁴³“Well, now, let us turn to this unfortunate German master. ⁴⁴⁴The boy was fully dressed when he fled. ⁴⁴⁵Therefore, he foresaw what he would do. ⁴⁴⁶But the German went without his socks. ⁴⁴⁷He certainly acted on very short notice.”

⁴⁴⁸“Undoubtedly.”

⁴⁴⁹“Why did he go? ⁴⁵⁰Because, from his bedroom window, he saw the flight of the boy. ⁴⁵¹Because he wished to overtake him and bring him back. ⁴⁵²He seized his bicycle, pursued the lad, and in pursuing him met his death.”

⁴⁵³“So it would seem.”

⁴⁵⁴“Now I come to the critical part of my argument. ⁴⁵⁵The natural action of a man in pursuing a little boy would be to run after him. ⁴⁵⁶He would know that he could overtake him. ⁴⁵⁷But the German does not do so. ⁴⁵⁸He turns to his bicycle. ⁴⁵⁹I am told that he was an excellent cyclist. ⁴⁶⁰He would not do this if he did not see that the boy had some swift means of escape.”

⁴⁶¹“The other bicycle.”

⁴⁶²“Let us continue our reconstruction. ⁴⁶³He meets his death five miles from the school—not by a bullet, mark you, which even a lad might conceivably discharge, but by a savage blow dealt by a vigorous arm. ⁴⁶⁴The lad, then, had a companion in his flight. ⁴⁶⁵And the flight was a swift one, since it took five miles before an expert cyclist could overtake them. ⁴⁶⁶Yet we survey the ground round the scene of the tragedy. ⁴⁶⁷What do we find? ⁴⁶⁸A few cattle tracks, nothing more. ⁴⁶⁹I took a wide sweep round, and there is no path within fifty yards. ⁴⁷⁰Another cyclist could have had nothing to do with the actual murder. ⁴⁷¹Nor were there any human footmarks.”

⁴⁷²“Holmes,” I cried, “this is impossible.”

⁴⁷³“Admirable!” he said. ⁴⁷⁴“A most illuminating remark. ⁴⁷⁵It is impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect have stated it wrong. ⁴⁷⁶Yet you saw for yourself. ⁴⁷⁷Can you suggest any fallacy?”

⁴⁷⁸“He could not have fractured his skull in a fall?”

⁴⁷⁹“In a morass, Watson?”

⁴⁸⁰“I am at my wit's end.”

⁴⁸¹“Tut, tut; we have solved some worse problems. ⁴⁸²At least we have plenty of material, if we can only use it. ⁴⁸³Come, then, and, having exhausted the Palmer, let us see what the Dunlop with the patched cover has to offer us.”

⁴⁸⁴We picked up the track and followed it onwards for some distance; but soon the moor rose into a long, heather-tufted curve, and we left the watercourse behind us. ⁴⁸⁵No further help from tracks could be hoped for. ⁴⁸⁶At the spot where we saw the last of the Dunlop tyre it might equally have led to Holderness Hall, the stately towers of which rose some miles to our left, or to a low, grey village which lay in front of us, and marked the position of the Chesterfield high road.

⁴⁸⁷As we approached the forbidding and squalid inn, with the sign of a game-cock above the door, Holmes gave a sudden groan and clutched me by the shoulder to save himself from falling. ⁴⁸⁸He had had one of those violent strains of the ankle which leave a man helpless. ⁴⁸⁹With difficulty he limped up to the door, where a squat, dark, elderly man was smoking a black clay pipe.

⁴⁹⁰“How are you, Mr. Reuben Hayes?” said Holmes.

⁴⁹¹“Who are you, and how do you get my name so pat?” the countryman answered, with a suspicious flash of a pair of cunning eyes.

⁴⁹²“Well, it's printed on the board above your head. ⁴⁹³It's easy to see a man who is master of his own house. ⁴⁹⁴I suppose you haven't such a thing as a carriage in your stables?”

⁴⁹⁵“No; I have not.”

⁴⁹⁶“I can hardly put my foot to the ground.”

⁴⁹⁷“Don't put it to the ground.”

⁴⁹⁸“But I can't walk.”

⁴⁹⁹“Well, then, hop.”

⁵⁰⁰Mr. Reuben Hayes's manner was far from gracious, but Holmes took it with admirable good-humour.

⁵⁰¹“Look here, my man,” said he. ⁵⁰²“This is really rather an awkward fix for me. ⁵⁰³I don't mind how I get on.”

⁵⁰⁴“Neither do I,” said the morose landlord.

⁵⁰⁵“The matter is very important. ⁵⁰⁶I would offer you a sovereign for the use of a bicycle.”

⁵⁰⁷The landlord pricked up his ears.

⁵⁰⁸“Where do you want to go?”

⁵⁰⁹“To Holderness Hall.”

⁵¹⁰“Pals of the Dook, I suppose?” said the landlord, surveying our mud-stained garments with ironical eyes.

⁵¹¹Holmes laughed good-naturedly.

⁵¹²“He'll be glad to see us, anyhow.”

⁵¹³“Why?”

⁵¹⁴“Because we bring him news of his lost son.”

⁵¹⁵The landlord gave a very visible start.

⁵¹⁶“What, you're on his track?”

⁵¹⁷“He has been heard of in Liverpool. ⁵¹⁸They expect to get him every hour.”

⁵¹⁹Again a swift change passed over the heavy, unshaven face. ⁵²⁰His manner was suddenly genial.

⁵²¹“I've less reason to wish the Dook well than most men,” said he, “for I was his head coachman once, and cruel bad he treated me. ⁵²²It was him that sacked me without a character on the word of a lying corn-chandler. ⁵²³But I'm glad to hear that the young lord was heard of in Liverpool, and I'll help you to take the news to the Hall.”

⁵²⁴“Thank you,” said Holmes. ⁵²⁵“We'll have some food first. ⁵²⁶Then you can bring round the bicycle.”

⁵²⁷“I haven't got a bicycle.”

⁵²⁸Holmes held up a sovereign.

⁵²⁹“I tell you, man, that I haven't got one. ⁵³⁰I'll let you have two horses as far as the Hall.”

⁵³¹“Well, well,” said Holmes, “we’ll talk about it when we’ve had something to eat.”

⁵³²When we were left alone in the stone-flagged kitchen it was astonishing how rapidly that sprained ankle recovered. ⁵³³It was nearly nightfall, and we had eaten nothing since early morning, so that we spent some time over our meal. ⁵³⁴Holmes was lost in thought, and once or twice he walked over to the window and stared earnestly out. ⁵³⁵It opened on to a squalid courtyard. ⁵³⁶In the far corner was a smithy, where a grimy lad was at work. ⁵³⁷On the other side were the stables. ⁵³⁸Holmes had sat down again after one of these excursions, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with a loud exclamation.

⁵³⁹“By Heaven, Watson, I believe that I’ve got it!” he cried. ⁵⁴⁰“Yes, yes, it must be so. ⁵⁴¹Watson, do you remember seeing any cow-tracks to-day?”

⁵⁴²“Yes, several.”

⁵⁴³“Where?”

⁵⁴⁴“Well, everywhere. ⁵⁴⁵They were at the morass, and again on the path, and again near where poor Heidegger met his death.”

⁵⁴⁶“Exactly. ⁵⁴⁷Well, now, Watson, how many cows did you see on the moor?”

⁵⁴⁸“I don’t remember seeing any.”

⁵⁴⁹“Strange, Watson, that we should see tracks all along our line, but never a cow on the whole moor; very strange, Watson, eh?”

⁵⁵⁰“Yes, it is strange.”

⁵⁵¹“Now, Watson, make an effort; throw your mind back! ⁵⁵²Can you see those tracks upon the path?”

⁵⁵³“Yes, I can.”

⁵⁵⁴“Can you recall that the tracks were sometimes like that, Watson”—he arranged a number of bread-crumbs in this fashion—: : : :—“and sometimes like this”—: : : :—“and occasionally like this”—. . . . ⁵⁵⁵“Can you remember that?”

⁵⁵⁶“No, I cannot.”

⁵⁵⁷“But I can. ⁵⁵⁸I could swear to it. ⁵⁵⁹However, we will go back at our leisure and verify it. ⁵⁶⁰What a blind beetle I have been not to draw my conclusion!”

⁵⁶¹“And what is your conclusion?”

⁵⁶²“Only that it is a remarkable cow which walks, canters, and gallops. ⁵⁶³By George, Watson, it was no brain of a country publican that thought out such a blind as that! ⁵⁶⁴The coast seems to be clear, save for that lad in the smithy. ⁵⁶⁵Let us slip out and see what we can see.”

⁵⁶⁶There were two rough-haired, unkempt horses in the tumble-down stable. ⁵⁶⁷Holmes raised the hind leg of one of them and laughed aloud.

⁵⁶⁸“Old shoes, but newly shod—old shoes, but new nails. ⁵⁶⁹This case deserves to be a classic. ⁵⁷⁰Let us go across to the smithy.”

⁵⁷¹The lad continued his work without regarding us. ⁵⁷²I saw Holmes’s eye darting to right and left among the litter of iron and wood which was scattered about the floor. ⁵⁷³Suddenly, however, we heard a step behind us, and there was the landlord, his heavy eyebrows drawn over his savage eyes, his swarthy features convulsed with passion. ⁵⁷⁴He held a short, metal-headed stick in his hand, and he advanced in so menacing a fashion that I was right glad to feel the revolver in my pocket.

⁵⁷⁵“You infernal spies!” the man cried. ⁵⁷⁶“What are you doing there?”

⁵⁷⁷“Why, Mr. Reuben Hayes,” said Holmes, coolly, “one might think that you were afraid of our finding something out.”

⁵⁷⁸The man mastered himself with a violent effort, and his grim mouth loosened into a false laugh, which was more menacing than his frown.

⁵⁷⁹“You're welcome to all you can find out in my smithy,” said he. ⁵⁸⁰“But look here, mister, I don't care for folk poking about my place without my leave, so the sooner you pay your score and get out of this the better I shall be pleased.”

⁵⁸¹“All right, Mr. Hayes—no harm meant,” said Holmes. ⁵⁸²“We have been having a look at your horses, but I think I'll walk after all. ⁵⁸³It's not far, I believe.”

⁵⁸⁴“Not more than two miles to the Hall gates. ⁵⁸⁵That's the road to the left.” ⁵⁸⁶He watched us with sullen eyes until we had left his premises.

⁵⁸⁷We did not go very far along the road, for Holmes stopped the instant that the curve hid us from the landlord's view.

⁵⁸⁸“We were warm, as the children say, at that inn,” said he. ⁵⁸⁹“I seem to grow colder every step that I take away from it. ⁵⁹⁰No, no; I can't possibly leave it.”

⁵⁹¹“I am convinced,” said I, “that this Reuben Hayes knows all about it. ⁵⁹²A more self-evident villain I never saw.”

⁵⁹³“Oh! he impressed you in that way, did he? ⁵⁹⁴There are the horses, there is the smithy. ⁵⁹⁵Yes, it is an interesting place, this Fighting Cock. ⁵⁹⁶I think we shall have another look at it in an unobtrusive way.”

⁵⁹⁷A long, sloping hillside, dotted with grey limestone boulders, stretched behind us. ⁵⁹⁸We had turned off the road, and were making our way up the hill, when, looking in the direction of Holderness Hall, I saw a cyclist coming swiftly along.

⁵⁹⁹“Get down, Watson!” cried Holmes, with a heavy hand upon my shoulder. ⁶⁰⁰We had hardly sunk from view when the man flew past us on the road. ⁶⁰¹Amid a rolling cloud of dust I caught a glimpse of a pale, agitated face—a face with horror in every lineament, the mouth open, the eyes staring wildly in front. ⁶⁰²It was like some strange caricature of the dapper James Wilder whom we had seen the night before.

⁶⁰³“The Duke's secretary!” cried Holmes. ⁶⁰⁴“Come, Watson, let us see what he does.”

⁶⁰⁵We scrambled from rock to rock until in a few moments we had made our way to a point from which we could see the front door of the inn. ⁶⁰⁶Wilder's bicycle was leaning against the wall beside it. ⁶⁰⁷No one was moving about the house, nor could we catch a glimpse of any faces at the windows. ⁶⁰⁸Slowly the twilight crept down as the sun sank behind the high towers of Holderness Hall. ⁶⁰⁹Then in the gloom we saw the two side-lamps of a trap light up in the stable yard of the inn, and shortly afterwards heard the rattle of hoofs, as it wheeled out into the road and tore off at a furious pace in the direction of Chesterfield.

⁶¹⁰“What do you make of that, Watson?” Holmes whispered.

⁶¹¹“It looks like a flight.”

⁶¹²“A single man in a dog-cart, so far as I could see. ⁶¹³Well, it certainly was not Mr. James Wilder, for there he is at the door.”

⁶¹⁴A red square of light had sprung out of the darkness. ⁶¹⁵In the middle of it was the black figure of the secretary, his head advanced, peering out into the night. ⁶¹⁶It was evident that he was expecting someone. ⁶¹⁷Then at last there were steps in the road, a second figure was visible for an instant against the light, the door shut, and all was black once more. ⁶¹⁸Five minutes later a lamp was lit in a room upon the first floor.

⁶¹⁹“It seems to be a curious class of custom that is done by the Fighting Cock,” said Holmes.

⁶²⁰“The bar is on the other side.”

⁶²¹“Quite so. ⁶²²These are what one may call the private guests. ⁶²³Now, what in the world is Mr. James Wilder doing in that den at this hour of night, and who is the companion who comes to meet him there?

⁶²⁴Come, Watson, we must really take a risk and try to investigate this a little more closely.”

⁶²⁵Together we stole down to the road and crept across to the door of the inn. ⁶²⁶The bicycle still leaned against the wall. ⁶²⁷Holmes struck a match and held it to the back wheel, and I heard him chuckle as the light fell upon a patched Dunlop tyre. ⁶²⁸Up above us was the lighted window.

⁶²⁹“I must have a peep through that, Watson. ⁶³⁰If you bend your back and support yourself upon the wall, I think that I can manage.”

⁶³¹An instant later his feet were on my shoulders. ⁶³²But he was hardly up before he was down again.

⁶³³“Come, my friend,” said he, “our day's work has been quite long enough. ⁶³⁴I think that we have gathered all that we can. ⁶³⁵It's a long walk to the school, and the sooner we get started the better.”

⁶³⁶He hardly opened his lips during that weary trudge across the moor, nor would he enter the school when he reached it, but went on to Mackleton Station, whence he could send some telegrams. ⁶³⁷Late at night I heard him consoling Dr. Huxtable, prostrated by the tragedy of his master's death, and later still he entered my room as alert and vigorous as he had been when he started in the morning. ⁶³⁸“All goes well, my friend,” said he. ⁶³⁹“I promise that before to-morrow evening we shall have reached the solution of the mystery.”

⁶⁴⁰At eleven o'clock next morning my friend and I were walking up the famous yew avenue of Holderness Hall. ⁶⁴¹We were ushered through the magnificent Elizabethan doorway and into his Grace's study. ⁶⁴²There we found Mr. James Wilder, demure and courtly, but with some trace of that wild terror of the night before still lurking in his furtive eyes and in his twitching features.

⁶⁴³“You have come to see his Grace? ⁶⁴⁴I am sorry; but the fact is that the Duke is far from well. ⁶⁴⁵He has been very much upset by the tragic news. ⁶⁴⁶We received a telegram from Dr. Huxtable yesterday afternoon, which told us of your discovery.”

⁶⁴⁷“I must see the Duke, Mr. Wilder.”

⁶⁴⁸“But he is in his room.”

⁶⁴⁹“Then I must go to his room.”

⁶⁵⁰“I believe he is in his bed.”

⁶⁵¹“I will see him there.”

⁶⁵²Holmes's cold and inexorable manner showed the secretary that it was useless to argue with him.

⁶⁵³“Very good, Mr. Holmes; I will tell him that you are here.”

⁶⁵⁴After half an hour's delay the great nobleman appeared. ⁶⁵⁵His face was more cadaverous than ever, his shoulders had rounded, and he seemed to me to be an altogether older man than he had been the

morning before. ⁶⁵⁶He greeted us with a stately courtesy and seated himself at his desk, his red beard streaming down on to the table.

⁶⁵⁷“Well, Mr. Holmes?” said he.

⁶⁵⁸But my friend's eyes were fixed upon the secretary, who stood by his master's chair.

⁶⁵⁹“I think, your Grace, that I could speak more freely in Mr. Wilder's absence.”

⁶⁶⁰The man turned a shade paler and cast a malignant glance at Holmes.

⁶⁶¹“If your Grace wishes—”

⁶⁶²“Yes, yes; you had better go. ⁶⁶³Now, Mr. Holmes, what have you to say?”

⁶⁶⁴My friend waited until the door had closed behind the retreating secretary.

⁶⁶⁵“The fact is, your Grace,” said he, “that my colleague, Dr. Watson, and myself had an assurance from Dr. Huxtable that a reward had been offered in this case. ⁶⁶⁶I should like to have this confirmed from your own lips.”

⁶⁶⁷“Certainly, Mr. Holmes.”

⁶⁶⁸“It amounted, if I am correctly informed, to five thousand pounds to anyone who will tell you where your son is?”

⁶⁶⁹“Exactly.”

⁶⁷⁰“And another thousand to the man who will name the person or persons who keep him in custody?”

⁶⁷¹“Exactly.”

⁶⁷²“Under the latter heading is included, no doubt, not only those who may have taken him away, but also those who conspire to keep him in his present position?”

⁶⁷³“Yes, yes,” cried the Duke, impatiently. ⁶⁷⁴“If you do your work well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you will have no reason to complain of niggardly treatment.”

⁶⁷⁵My friend rubbed his thin hands together with an appearance of avidity which was a surprise to me, who knew his frugal tastes.

⁶⁷⁶“I fancy that I see your Grace's cheque-book upon the table,” said he. ⁶⁷⁷“I should be glad if you would make me out a cheque for six thousand pounds. ⁶⁷⁸It would be as well, perhaps, for you to cross it. ⁶⁷⁹The Capital and Counties Bank, Oxford Street branch, are my agents.”

⁶⁸⁰His Grace sat very stern and upright in his chair, and looked stonily at my friend.

⁶⁸¹“Is this a joke, Mr. Holmes? ⁶⁸²It is hardly a subject for pleasantry.”

⁶⁸³“Not at all, your Grace. ⁶⁸⁴I was never more earnest in my life.”

⁶⁸⁵“What do you mean, then?”

⁶⁸⁶“I mean that I have earned the reward. ⁶⁸⁷I know where your son is, and I know some, at least, of those who are holding him.”

⁶⁸⁸The Duke's beard had turned more aggressively red than ever against his ghastly white face.

⁶⁸⁹“Where is he?” he gasped.

⁶⁹⁰“He is, or was last night, at the Fighting Cock Inn, about two miles from your park gate.”

⁶⁹¹The Duke fell back in his chair.

⁶⁹²“And whom do you accuse?”

⁶⁹³Sherlock Holmes's answer was an astounding one. ⁶⁹⁴He stepped swiftly forward and touched the Duke upon the shoulder.

⁶⁹⁵“I accuse you,” said he. ⁶⁹⁶“And now, your Grace, I'll trouble you for that cheque.”

⁶⁹⁷Never shall I forget the Duke's appearance as he sprang up and clawed with his hands like one who is sinking into an abyss. ⁶⁹⁸Then, with an extraordinary effort of aristocratic self-command, he sat down and sank his face in his hands. ⁶⁹⁹It was some minutes before he spoke.

⁷⁰⁰“How much do you know?” he asked at last, without raising his head.

⁷⁰¹“I saw you together last night.”

⁷⁰²“Does anyone else besides your friend know?”

⁷⁰³“I have spoken to no one.”

⁷⁰⁴The Duke took a pen in his quivering fingers and opened his cheque-book.

⁷⁰⁵“I shall be as good as my word, Mr. Holmes. ⁷⁰⁶I am about to write your cheque, however unwelcome the information which you have gained may be to me. ⁷⁰⁷When the offer was first made I little thought the turn which events might take. ⁷⁰⁸But you and your friend are men of discretion, Mr. Holmes?”

⁷⁰⁹“I hardly understand your Grace.”

⁷¹⁰“I must put it plainly, Mr. Holmes. ⁷¹¹If only you two know of this incident, there is no reason why it should go any farther. ⁷¹²I think twelve thousand pounds is the sum that I owe you, is it not?”

⁷¹³But Holmes smiled and shook his head.

⁷¹⁴“I fear, your Grace, that matters can hardly be arranged so easily. ⁷¹⁵There is the death of this schoolmaster to be accounted for.”

⁷¹⁶“But James knew nothing of that. ⁷¹⁷You cannot hold him responsible for that. ⁷¹⁸It was the work of this brutal ruffian whom he had the misfortune to employ.”

⁷¹⁹“I must take the view, your Grace, that when a man embarks upon a crime he is morally guilty of any other crime which may spring from it.”

⁷²⁰“Morally, Mr. Holmes. ⁷²¹No doubt you are right. ⁷²²But surely not in the eyes of the law. ⁷²³A man cannot be condemned for a murder at which he was not present, and which he loathes and abhors as much as you do. ⁷²⁴The instant that he heard of it he made a complete confession to me, so filled was he with horror and remorse. ⁷²⁵He lost not an hour in breaking entirely with the murderer. ⁷²⁶Oh, Mr. Holmes, you must save him—you must save him! ⁷²⁷I tell you that you must save him!” ⁷²⁸The Duke had dropped the last attempt at self-command, and was pacing the room with a convulsed face and with his clenched hands raving in the air. ⁷²⁹At last he mastered himself and sat down once more at his desk. ⁷³⁰“I appreciate your conduct in coming here before you spoke to anyone else,” said he. ⁷³¹“At least, we may take counsel how far we can minimize this hideous scandal.”

⁷³²“Exactly,” said Holmes. ⁷³³“I think, your Grace, that this can only be done by absolute and complete frankness between us. ⁷³⁴I am disposed to help your Grace to the best of my ability; but in order to do so I must understand to the last detail how the matter stands. ⁷³⁵I realize that your words applied to Mr. James Wilder, and that he is not the murderer.”

⁷³⁶“No; the murderer has escaped.”

⁷³⁷Sherlock Holmes smiled demurely.

⁷³⁸“Your Grace can hardly have heard of any small reputation which I possess, or you would not imagine that it is so easy to escape me. ⁷³⁹Mr. Reuben Hayes was arrested at Chesterfield on my information at eleven o'clock last night. ⁷⁴⁰I had a telegram from the head of the local police before I left the school this morning.”

⁷⁴¹The Duke leaned back in his chair and stared with amazement at my friend.

⁷⁴²“You seem to have powers that are hardly human,” said he. ⁷⁴³“So Reuben Hayes is taken? ⁷⁴⁴I am right glad to hear it, if it will not react upon the fate of James.”

⁷⁴⁵“Your secretary?”

⁷⁴⁶“No, sir; my son.”

⁷⁴⁷It was Holmes's turn to look astonished.

⁷⁴⁸“I confess that this is entirely new to me, your Grace. ⁷⁴⁹I must beg you to be more explicit.”

⁷⁵⁰“I will conceal nothing from you. ⁷⁵¹I agree with you that complete frankness, however painful it may be to me, is the best policy in this desperate situation to which James's folly and jealousy have reduced us. ⁷⁵²When I was a very young man, Mr. Holmes, I loved with such a love as comes only once in a lifetime. ⁷⁵³I offered the lady marriage, but she refused it on the grounds that such a match might mar my career. ⁷⁵⁴Had she lived I would certainly never have married anyone else. ⁷⁵⁵She died, and left this one child, whom for her sake I have cherished and cared for. ⁷⁵⁶I could not acknowledge the paternity to the world; but I gave him the best of educations, and since he came to manhood I have kept him near my person. ⁷⁵⁷He surprised my secret, and has presumed ever since upon the claim which he has upon me and upon his power of provoking a scandal, which would be abhorrent to me. ⁷⁵⁸His presence had something to do with the unhappy issue of my marriage. ⁷⁵⁹Above all, he hated my young legitimate heir from the first with a persistent hatred. ⁷⁶⁰You may well ask me why, under these circumstances, I still kept James under my roof. ⁷⁶¹I answer that it was because I could see his mother's face in his, and that for her dear sake there was no end to my long-suffering. ⁷⁶²All her pretty ways, too—there was not one of them which he could not suggest and bring back to my memory. ⁷⁶³I could not send him away. ⁷⁶⁴But I feared so much lest he should do Arthur—that is, Lord Saltire—a mischief that I dispatched him for safety to Dr. Huxtable's school.

⁷⁶⁵“James came into contact with this fellow Hayes because the man was a tenant of mine, and James acted as agent. ⁷⁶⁶The fellow was a rascal from the beginning; but in some extraordinary way James became intimate with him. ⁷⁶⁷He had always a taste for low company. ⁷⁶⁸When James determined to kidnap Lord Saltire it was of this man's service that he availed himself. ⁷⁶⁹You remember that I wrote to Arthur upon that last day. ⁷⁷⁰Well, James opened the letter and inserted a note asking Arthur to meet him in a little wood called the Ragged Shaw, which is near to the school. ⁷⁷¹He used the Duchess's name, and in that way got the boy to come. ⁷⁷²That evening James bicycled over—I am telling you what he has himself confessed to me—and he told Arthur, whom he met in the wood, that his mother longed to see him, that she was awaiting him on the moor, and that if he would come back into the wood at midnight he would find a man with a horse, who would take him to her. ⁷⁷³Poor Arthur fell into the trap. ⁷⁷⁴He came to the appointment and found this fellow Hayes with a led pony. ⁷⁷⁵Arthur mounted, and they set off together. ⁷⁷⁶It appears—though this James only heard yesterday—that they were pursued, that Hayes struck the pursuer with his stick, and that the man died of his injuries. ⁷⁷⁷Hayes brought Arthur to his public-house, the Fighting Cock, where he was confined in an upper room, under the care of Mrs. Hayes, who is a kindly woman, but entirely under the control of her brutal husband.

⁷⁷⁸“Well, Mr. Holmes, that was the state of affairs when I first saw you two days ago. ⁷⁷⁹I had no more idea of the truth than you. ⁷⁸⁰You will ask me what was James's motive in doing such a deed. ⁷⁸¹I answer

that there was a great deal which was unreasoning and fanatical in the hatred which he bore my heir.⁷⁸²In his view he should himself have been heir of all my estates, and he deeply resented those social laws which made it impossible.⁷⁸³At the same time he had a definite motive also.⁷⁸⁴He was eager that I should break the entail, and he was of opinion that it lay in my power to do so.⁷⁸⁵He intended to make a bargain with me—to restore Arthur if I would break the entail, and so make it possible for the estate to be left to him by will.⁷⁸⁶He knew well that I should never willingly invoke the aid of the police against him.⁷⁸⁷I say that he would have proposed such a bargain to me, but he did not actually do so, for events moved too quickly for him, and he had not time to put his plans into practice.

⁷⁸⁸“What brought all his wicked scheme to wreck was your discovery of this man Heidegger's dead body.⁷⁸⁹James was seized with horror at the news.⁷⁹⁰It came to us yesterday as we sat together in this study.⁷⁹¹Dr. Huxtable had sent a telegram.⁷⁹²James was so overwhelmed with grief and agitation that my suspicions, which had never been entirely absent, rose instantly to a certainty, and I taxed him with the deed.⁷⁹³He made a complete voluntary confession.⁷⁹⁴Then he implored me to keep his secret for three days longer, so as to give his wretched accomplice a chance of saving his guilty life.⁷⁹⁵I yielded—as I have always yielded—to his prayers, and instantly James hurried off to the Fighting Cock to warn Hayes and give him the means of flight.⁷⁹⁶I could not go there by daylight without provoking comment, but as soon as night fell I hurried off to see my dear Arthur.⁷⁹⁷I found him safe and well, but horrified beyond expression by the dreadful deed he had witnessed.⁷⁹⁸In deference to my promise, and much against my will, I consented to leave him there for three days under the charge of Mrs. Hayes, since it was evident that it was impossible to inform the police where he was without telling them also who was the murderer, and I could not see how that murderer could be punished without ruin to my unfortunate James.⁷⁹⁹You asked for frankness, Mr. Holmes, and I have taken you at your word, for I have now told you everything without an attempt at circumlocution or concealment.⁸⁰⁰Do you in turn be as frank with me.”

⁸⁰¹“I will,” said Holmes.⁸⁰²“In the first place, your Grace, I am bound to tell you that you have placed yourself in a most serious position in the eyes of the law.⁸⁰³You have condoned a felony and you have aided the escape of a murderer; for I cannot doubt that any money which was taken by James Wilder to aid his accomplice in his flight came from your Grace's purse.”

⁸⁰⁴The Duke bowed his assent.

⁸⁰⁵“This is indeed a most serious matter.⁸⁰⁶Even more culpable in my opinion, your Grace, is your attitude towards your younger son.⁸⁰⁷You leave him in this den for three days.”

⁸⁰⁸“Under solemn promises—”

⁸⁰⁹“What are promises to such people as these?⁸¹⁰You have no guarantee that he will not be spirited away again.⁸¹¹To humour your guilty elder son you have exposed your innocent younger son to imminent and unnecessary danger.⁸¹²It was a most unjustifiable action.”

⁸¹³The proud lord of Holderness was not accustomed to be so rated in his own ducal hall.⁸¹⁴The blood flushed into his high forehead, but his conscience held him dumb.

⁸¹⁵“I will help you, but on one condition only.⁸¹⁶It is that you ring for the footman and let me give such orders as I like.”

⁸¹⁷Without a word the Duke pressed the electric bell.⁸¹⁸A servant entered.

⁸¹⁹“You will be glad to hear,” said Holmes, “that your young master is found.⁸²⁰It is the Duke's desire that the carriage shall go at once to the Fighting Cock Inn to bring Lord Saltire home.

⁸²¹“Now,” said Holmes, when the rejoicing lackey had disappeared, “having secured the future, we can afford to be more lenient with the past.⁸²²I am not in an official position, and there is no reason, so long

as the ends of justice are served, why I should disclose all that I know. ⁸²³As to Hayes I say nothing. ⁸²⁴The gallows awaits him, and I would do nothing to save him from it. ⁸²⁵What he will divulge I cannot tell, but I have no doubt that your Grace could make him understand that it is to his interest to be silent. ⁸²⁶From the police point of view he will have kidnapped the boy for the purpose of ransom. ⁸²⁷If they do not themselves find it out I see no reason why I should prompt them to take a broader point of view. ⁸²⁸I would warn your Grace, however, that the continued presence of Mr. James Wilder in your household can only lead to misfortune."

⁸²⁹"I understand that, Mr. Holmes, and it is already settled that he shall leave me for ever and go to seek his fortune in Australia."

⁸³⁰"In that case, your Grace, since you have yourself stated that any unhappiness in your married life was caused by his presence, I would suggest that you make such amends as you can to the Duchess, and that you try to resume those relations which have been so unhappily interrupted."

⁸³¹"That also I have arranged, Mr. Holmes. ⁸³²I wrote to the Duchess this morning."

⁸³³"In that case," said Holmes, rising, "I think that my friend and I can congratulate ourselves upon several most happy results from our little visit to the North. ⁸³⁴There is one other small point upon which I desire some light. ⁸³⁵This fellow Hayes had shod his horses with shoes which counterfeited the tracks of cows. ⁸³⁶Was it from Mr. Wilder that he learned so extraordinary a device?"

⁸³⁷The Duke stood in thought for a moment, with a look of intense surprise on his face. ⁸³⁸Then he opened a door and showed us into a large room furnished as a museum. ⁸³⁹He led the way to a glass case in a corner, and pointed to the inscription.

⁸⁴⁰"These shoes," it ran, "were dug up in the moat of Holdernes Hall. ⁸⁴¹They are for the use of horses; but they are shaped below with a cloven foot of iron, so as to throw pursuers off the track. ⁸⁴²They are supposed to have belonged to some of the marauding Barons of Holdernes in the Middle Ages."

⁸⁴³Holmes opened the case, and moistening his finger he passed it along the shoe. ⁸⁴⁴A thin film of recent mud was left upon his skin.

⁸⁴⁵"Thank you," said he, as he replaced the glass. ⁸⁴⁶"It is the second most interesting object that I have seen in the North."

⁸⁴⁷"And the first?"

⁸⁴⁸Holmes folded up his cheque and placed it carefully in his note-book. ⁸⁴⁹"I am a poor man," said he, as he patted it affectionately and thrust it into the depths of his inner pocket.

The Adventure of Black Peter

¹I have never known my friend to be in better form, both mental and physical, than in the year '95. ²His increasing fame had brought with it an immense practice, and I should be guilty of an indiscretion if I were even to hint at the identity of some of the illustrious clients who crossed our humble threshold in Baker Street. ³Holmes, however, like all great artists, lived for his art's sake, and, save in the case of the Duke of Holderness, I have seldom known him claim any large reward for his inestimable services. ⁴So unworldly was he—or so capricious—that he frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies, while he would devote weeks of most intense application to the affairs of some humble client whose case presented those strange and dramatic qualities which appealed to his imagination and challenged his ingenuity.

⁵In this memorable year '95 a curious and incongruous succession of cases had engaged his attention, ranging from his famous investigation of the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca—an inquiry which was carried out by him at the express desire of His Holiness the Pope—down to his arrest of Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer, which removed a plague-spot from the East-End of London. ⁶Close on the heels of these two famous cases came the tragedy of Woodman's Lee, and the very obscure circumstances which surrounded the death of Captain Peter Carey. ⁷No record of the doings of Mr. Sherlock Holmes would be complete which did not include some account of this very unusual affair.

⁸During the first week of July my friend had been absent so often and so long from our lodgings that I knew he had something on hand. ⁹The fact that several rough-looking men called during that time and inquired for Captain Basil made me understand that Holmes was working somewhere under one of the numerous disguises and names with which he concealed his own formidable identity. ¹⁰He had at least five small refuges in different parts of London in which he was able to change his personality. ¹¹He said nothing of his business to me, and it was not my habit to force a confidence. ¹²The first positive sign which he gave me of the direction which his investigation was taking was an extraordinary one. ¹³He had gone out before breakfast, and I had sat down to mine, when he strode into the room, his hat upon his head and a huge barbed-headed spear tucked like an umbrella under his arm.

¹⁴“Good gracious, Holmes!” I cried. ¹⁵“You don't mean to say that you have been walking about London with that thing?”

¹⁶“I drove to the butcher's and back.”

¹⁷“The butcher's?”

¹⁸“And I return with an excellent appetite. ¹⁹There can be no question, my dear Watson, of the value of exercise before breakfast. ²⁰But I am prepared to bet that you will not guess the form that my exercise has taken.”

²¹“I will not attempt it.”

²²He chuckled as he poured out the coffee.

²³“If you could have looked into Allardyce's back shop you would have seen a dead pig swung from a hook in the ceiling, and a gentleman in his shirt-sleeves furiously stabbing at it with this weapon. ²⁴I was that energetic person, and I have satisfied myself that by no exertion of my strength can I transfix the pig with a single blow. ²⁵Perhaps you would care to try?”

²⁶“Not for worlds. ²⁷But why were you doing this?”

²⁸“Because it seemed to me to have an indirect bearing upon the mystery of Woodman's Lee. ²⁹Ah, Hopkins, I got your wire last night, and I have been expecting you. ³⁰Come and join us.”

³¹Our visitor was an exceedingly alert man, thirty years of age, dressed in a quiet tweed suit, but retaining the erect bearing of one who was accustomed to official uniform. ³²I recognised him at once as Stanley Hopkins, a young police inspector for whose future Holmes had high hopes, while he in turn professed the admiration and respect of a pupil for the scientific methods of the famous amateur. ³³Hopkins's brow was clouded, and he sat down with an air of deep dejection.

³⁴“No, thank you, sir. ³⁵I breakfasted before I came round. ³⁶I spent the night in town, for I came up yesterday to report.”

³⁷“And what had you to report?”

³⁸“Failure, sir; absolute failure.”

³⁹“You have made no progress?”

⁴⁰“None.”

⁴¹“Dear me! ⁴²I must have a look at the matter.”

⁴³“I wish to heavens that you would, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁴It's my first big chance, and I am at my wit's end. ⁴⁵For goodness' sake come down and lend me a hand.”

⁴⁶“Well, well, it just happens that I have already read all the available evidence, including the report of the inquest, with some care. ⁴⁷By the way, what do you make of that tobacco-pouch found on the scene of the crime? ⁴⁸Is there no clue there?”

⁴⁹Hopkins looked surprised.

⁵⁰“It was the man's own pouch, sir. ⁵¹His initials were inside it. ⁵²And it was of seal-skin—and he an old sealer.”

⁵³“But he had no pipe.”

⁵⁴“No, sir, we could find no pipe; indeed, he smoked very little. ⁵⁵And yet he might have kept some tobacco for his friends.”

⁵⁶“No doubt. ⁵⁷I only mention it because if I had been handling the case I should have been inclined to make that the starting-point of my investigation. ⁵⁸However, my friend Dr. Watson knows nothing of this matter, and I should be none the worse for hearing the sequence of events once more. ⁵⁹Just give us some short sketch of the essentials.”

⁶⁰Stanley Hopkins drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

⁶¹“I have a few dates here which will give you the career of the dead man, Captain Peter Carey. ⁶²He was born in '45—fifty years of age. ⁶³He was a most daring and successful seal and whale fisher. ⁶⁴In 1883 he commanded the steam sealer *Sea Unicorn*, of Dundee. ⁶⁵He had then had several successful voyages in succession, and in the following year, 1884, he retired. ⁶⁶After that he travelled for some years, and finally he bought a small place called Woodman's Lee, near Forest Row, in Sussex. ⁶⁷There he has lived for six years, and there he died just a week ago to-day.

⁶⁸“There were some most singular points about the man. ⁶⁹In ordinary life he was a strict Puritan—a silent, gloomy fellow. ⁷⁰His household consisted of his wife, his daughter, aged twenty, and two female servants. ⁷¹These last were continually changing, for it was never a very cheery situation, and sometimes it became past all bearing. ⁷²The man was an intermittent drunkard, and when he had the fit on him he was a perfect fiend. ⁷³He has been known to drive his wife and his daughter out of doors in the middle of the night, and flog them through the park until the whole village outside the gates was aroused by their screams.

⁷⁴“He was summoned once for a savage assault upon the old vicar, who had called upon him to remonstrate with him upon his conduct. ⁷⁵In short, Mr. Holmes, you would go far before you found a more dangerous man than Peter Carey, and I have heard that he bore the same character when he commanded his ship. ⁷⁶He was known in the trade as Black Peter, and the name was given him, not only on account of his swarthy features and the colour of his huge beard, but for the humours which were the terror of all around him. ⁷⁷I need not say that he was loathed and avoided by every one of his neighbours, and that I have not heard one single word of sorrow about his terrible end.

⁷⁸“You must have read in the account of the inquest about the man's cabin, Mr. Holmes; but perhaps your friend here has not heard of it. ⁷⁹He had built himself a wooden outhouse—he always called it ‘the cabin’—a few hundred yards from his house, and it was here that he slept every night. ⁸⁰It was a little, single-roomed hut, sixteen feet by ten. ⁸¹He kept the key in his pocket, made his own bed, cleaned it himself, and allowed no other foot to cross the threshold. ⁸²There are small windows on each side, which were covered by curtains and never opened. ⁸³One of these windows was turned towards the high road, and when the light burned in it at night the folk used to point it out to each other and wonder what Black Peter was doing in there. ⁸⁴That's the window, Mr. Holmes, which gave us one of the few bits of positive evidence that came out at the inquest.

⁸⁵“You remember that a stonemason, named Slater, walking from Forest Row about one o'clock in the morning—two days before the murder—stopped as he passed the grounds and looked at the square of light still shining among the trees. ⁸⁶He swears that the shadow of a man's head turned sideways was clearly visible on the blind, and that this shadow was certainly not that of Peter Carey, whom he knew well. ⁸⁷It was that of a bearded man, but the beard was short and bristled forwards in a way very different from that of the captain. ⁸⁸So he says, but he had been two hours in the public-house, and it is some distance from the road to the window. ⁸⁹Besides, this refers to the Monday, and the crime was done upon the Wednesday.

⁹⁰“On the Tuesday Peter Carey was in one of his blackest moods, flushed with drink and as savage as a dangerous wild beast. ⁹¹He roamed about the house, and the women ran for it when they heard him coming. ⁹²Late in the evening he went down to his own hut. ⁹³About two o'clock the following morning his daughter, who slept with her window open, heard a most fearful yell from that direction, but it was no unusual thing for him to bawl and shout when he was in drink, so no notice was taken. ⁹⁴On rising at seven one of the maids noticed that the door of the hut was open, but so great was the terror which the man caused that it was midday before anyone would venture down to see what had become of him. ⁹⁵Peeping into the open door they saw a sight which sent them flying with white faces into the village. ⁹⁶Within an hour I was on the spot and had taken over the case.

⁹⁷“Well, I have fairly steady nerves, as you know, Mr. Holmes, but I give you my word that I got a shake when I put my head into that little house. ⁹⁸It was droning like a harmonium with the flies and bluebottles, and the floor and walls were like a slaughter-house. ⁹⁹He had called it a cabin, and a cabin it was sure enough, for you would have thought that you were in a ship. ¹⁰⁰There was a bunk at one end, a sea-chest, maps and charts, a picture of the Sea Unicorn, a line of log-books on a shelf, all exactly as one would expect to find it in a captain's room. ¹⁰¹And there in the middle of it was the man himself, his face twisted like a lost soul in torment, and his great brindled beard stuck upwards in his agony. ¹⁰²Right through his broad breast a steel harpoon had been driven, and it had sunk deep into the wood of the wall behind him. ¹⁰³He was pinned like a beetle on a card. ¹⁰⁴Of course, he was quite dead, and had been so from the instant that he had uttered that last yell of agony.

¹⁰⁵“I know your methods, sir, and I applied them. ¹⁰⁶Before I permitted anything to be moved I examined most carefully the ground outside, and also the floor of the room. ¹⁰⁷There were no footmarks.”

¹⁰⁸“Meaning that you saw none?”

¹⁰⁹“I assure you, sir, that there were none.”

¹¹⁰“My good Hopkins, I have investigated many crimes, but I have never yet seen one which was committed by a flying creature. ¹¹¹As long as the criminal remains upon two legs so long must there be some indentation, some abrasion, some trifling displacement which can be detected by the scientific searcher. ¹¹²It is incredible that this blood-bespattered room contained no trace which could have aided us. ¹¹³I understand, however, from the inquest that there were some objects which you failed to overlook?”

¹¹⁴The young inspector winced at my companion's ironical comments.

¹¹⁵“I was a fool not to call you in at the time, Mr. Holmes. ¹¹⁶However, that's past praying for now. ¹¹⁷Yes, there were several objects in the room which called for special attention. ¹¹⁸One was the harpoon with which the deed was committed. ¹¹⁹It had been snatched down from a rack on the wall. ¹²⁰Two others remained there, and there was a vacant place for the third. ¹²¹On the stock was engraved ‘S.S.. Sea Unicorn, Dundee.’ ¹²²This seemed to establish that the crime had been done in a moment of fury, and that the murderer had seized the first weapon which came in his way. ¹²³The fact that the crime was committed at two in the morning, and yet Peter Carey was fully dressed, suggested that he had an appointment with the murderer, which is borne out by the fact that a bottle of rum and two dirty glasses stood upon the table.”

¹²⁴“Yes,” said Holmes; “I think that both inferences are permissible. ¹²⁵Was there any other spirit but rum in the room?”

¹²⁶“Yes; there was a tantalus containing brandy and whisky on the sea-chest. ¹²⁷It is of no importance to us, however, since the decanters were full, and it had therefore not been used.”

¹²⁸“For all that its presence has some significance,” said Holmes. ¹²⁹“However, let us hear some more about the objects which do seem to you to bear upon the case.”

¹³⁰“There was this tobacco-pouch upon the table.”

¹³¹“What part of the table?”

¹³²“It lay in the middle. ¹³³It was of coarse seal-skin—the straight-haired skin, with a leather thong to bind it. ¹³⁴Inside was ‘P.C.’ on the flap. ¹³⁵There was half an ounce of strong ship's tobacco in it.”

¹³⁶“Excellent! ¹³⁷What more?”

¹³⁸Stanley Hopkins drew from his pocket a drab-covered note-book. ¹³⁹The outside was rough and worn, the leaves discoloured. ¹⁴⁰On the first page were written the initials “J.H.N.” and the date “1883.” ¹⁴¹Holmes laid it on the table and examined it in his minute way, while Hopkins and I gazed over each shoulder. ¹⁴²On the second page were the printed letters “C.P.R.,” and then came several sheets of numbers. ¹⁴³Another heading was Argentine, another Costa Rica, and another San Paulo, each with pages of signs and figures after it.

¹⁴⁴“What do you make of these?” asked Holmes.

¹⁴⁵“They appear to be lists of Stock Exchange securities. ¹⁴⁶I thought that ‘J.H.N.’ were the initials of a broker, and that ‘C.P.R.’ may have been his client.”

¹⁴⁷“Try Canadian Pacific Railway,” said Holmes.

¹⁴⁸Stanley Hopkins swore between his teeth and struck his thigh with his clenched hand.

¹⁴⁹“What a fool I have been!” he cried. ¹⁵⁰“Of course, it is as you say. ¹⁵¹Then ‘J.H.N.’ are the only initials we have to solve. ¹⁵²I have already examined the old Stock Exchange lists, and I can find no one in 1883 either in the House or among the outside brokers whose initials correspond with these. ¹⁵³Yet I feel that the clue is the most important one that I hold. ¹⁵⁴You will admit, Mr. Holmes, that there is a

possibility that these initials are those of the second person who was present—in other words, of the murderer. ¹⁵⁵I would also urge that the introduction into the case of a document relating to large masses of valuable securities gives us for the first time some indication of a motive for the crime.”

¹⁵⁶Sherlock Holmes's face showed that he was thoroughly taken aback by this new development.

¹⁵⁷“I must admit both your points,” said he. ¹⁵⁸“I confess that this note-book, which did not appear at the inquest, modifies any views which I may have formed. ¹⁵⁹I had come to a theory of the crime in which I can find no place for this. ¹⁶⁰Have you endeavoured to trace any of the securities here mentioned?”

¹⁶¹“Inquiries are now being made at the offices, but I fear that the complete register of the stockholders of these South American concerns is in South America, and that some weeks must elapse before we can trace the shares.”

¹⁶²Holmes had been examining the cover of the note-book with his magnifying lens.

¹⁶³“Surely there is some discolouration here,” said he.

¹⁶⁴“Yes, sir, it is a blood-stain. ¹⁶⁵I told you that I picked the book off the floor.”

¹⁶⁶“Was the blood-stain above or below?”

¹⁶⁷“On the side next the boards.”

¹⁶⁸“Which proves, of course, that the book was dropped after the crime was committed.”

¹⁶⁹“Exactly, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁷⁰I appreciated that point, and I conjectured that it was dropped by the murderer in his hurried flight. ¹⁷¹It lay near the door.”

¹⁷²“I suppose that none of these securities have been found among the property of the dead man?”

¹⁷³“No, sir.”

¹⁷⁴“Have you any reason to suspect robbery?”

¹⁷⁵“No, sir. ¹⁷⁶Nothing seemed to have been touched.”

¹⁷⁷“Dear me, it is certainly a very interesting case. ¹⁷⁸Then there was a knife, was there not?”

¹⁷⁹“A sheath-knife, still in its sheath. ¹⁸⁰It lay at the feet of the dead man. ¹⁸¹Mrs. Carey has identified it as being her husband's property.”

¹⁸²Holmes was lost in thought for some time.

¹⁸³“Well,” said he, at last, “I suppose I shall have to come out and have a look at it.”

¹⁸⁴Stanley Hopkins gave a cry of joy.

¹⁸⁵“Thank you, sir. ¹⁸⁶That will indeed be a weight off my mind.”

¹⁸⁷Holmes shook his finger at the inspector.

¹⁸⁸“It would have been an easier task a week ago,” said he. ¹⁸⁹“But even now my visit may not be entirely fruitless. ¹⁹⁰Watson, if you can spare the time I should be very glad of your company. ¹⁹¹If you will call a four-wheeler, Hopkins, we shall be ready to start for Forest Row in a quarter of an hour.”

¹⁹²Alighting at the small wayside station, we drove for some miles through the remains of widespread woods, which were once part of that great forest which for so long held the Saxon invaders at bay—the impenetrable “weald,” for sixty years the bulwark of Britain. ¹⁹³Vast sections of it have been cleared,

for this is the seat of the first iron-works of the country, and the trees have been felled to smelt the ore.¹⁹⁴ Now the richer fields of the North have absorbed the trade, and nothing save these ravaged groves and great scars in the earth show the work of the past.¹⁹⁵ Here in a clearing upon the green slope of a hill stood a long, low stone house, approached by a curving drive running through the fields.¹⁹⁶ Nearer the road, and surrounded on three sides by bushes, was a small outhouse, one window and the door facing in our direction.¹⁹⁷ It was the scene of the murder.

¹⁹⁸ Stanley Hopkins led us first to the house, where he introduced us to a haggard, grey-haired woman, the widow of the murdered man, whose gaunt and deep-lined face, with the furtive look of terror in the depths of her red-rimmed eyes, told of the years of hardship and ill-usage which she had endured.¹⁹⁹ With her was her daughter, a pale, fair-haired girl, whose eyes blazed defiantly at us as she told us that she was glad that her father was dead, and that she blessed the hand which had struck him down.²⁰⁰ It was a terrible household that Black Peter Carey had made for himself, and it was with a sense of relief that we found ourselves in the sunlight again and making our way along a path which had been worn across the fields by the feet of the dead man.

²⁰¹ The outhouse was the simplest of dwellings, wooden-walled, shingle-roofed, one window beside the door and one on the farther side.²⁰² Stanley Hopkins drew the key from his pocket, and had stooped to the lock, when he paused with a look of attention and surprise upon his face.

²⁰³ "Someone has been tampering with it," he said.

²⁰⁴ There could be no doubt of the fact.²⁰⁵ The woodwork was cut and the scratches showed white through the paint, as if they had been that instant done.²⁰⁶ Holmes had been examining the window.

²⁰⁷ "Someone has tried to force this also.²⁰⁸ Whoever it was has failed to make his way in.²⁰⁹ He must have been a very poor burglar."

²¹⁰ "This is a most extraordinary thing," said the inspector; "I could swear that these marks were not here yesterday evening."

²¹¹ "Some curious person from the village, perhaps," I suggested.

²¹² "Very unlikely.²¹³ Few of them would dare to set foot in the grounds, far less try to force their way into the cabin.²¹⁴ What do you think of it, Mr. Holmes?"

²¹⁵ "I think that fortune is very kind to us."

²¹⁶ "You mean that the person will come again?"

²¹⁷ "It is very probable.²¹⁸ He came expecting to find the door open.²¹⁹ He tried to get in with the blade of a very small penknife.²²⁰ He could not manage it.²²¹ What would he do?"

²²² "Come again next night with a more useful tool."

²²³ "So I should say.²²⁴ It will be our fault if we are not there to receive him.²²⁵ Meanwhile, let me see the inside of the cabin."

²²⁶ The traces of the tragedy had been removed, but the furniture within the little room still stood as it had been on the night of the crime.²²⁷ For two hours, with most intense concentration, Holmes examined every object in turn, but his face showed that his quest was not a successful one.²²⁸ Once only he paused in his patient investigation.

²²⁹ "Have you taken anything off this shelf, Hopkins?"

²³⁰ "No; I have moved nothing."

²³¹“Something has been taken. ²³²There is less dust in this corner of the shelf than elsewhere. ²³³It may have been a book lying on its side. ²³⁴It may have been a box. ²³⁵Well, well, I can do nothing more. ²³⁶Let us walk in these beautiful woods, Watson, and give a few hours to the birds and the flowers. ²³⁷We shall meet you here later, Hopkins, and see if we can come to closer quarters with the gentleman who has paid this visit in the night.”

²³⁸It was past eleven o'clock when we formed our little ambushade. ²³⁹Hopkins was for leaving the door of the hut open, but Holmes was of the opinion that this would rouse the suspicions of the stranger. ²⁴⁰The lock was a perfectly simple one, and only a strong blade was needed to push it back. ²⁴¹Holmes also suggested that we should wait, not inside the hut, but outside it among the bushes which grew round the farther window. ²⁴²In this way we should be able to watch our man if he struck a light, and see what his object was in this stealthy nocturnal visit.

²⁴³It was a long and melancholy vigil, and yet brought with it something of the thrill which the hunter feels when he lies beside the water pool and waits for the coming of the thirsty beast of prey. ²⁴⁴What savage creature was it which might steal upon us out of the darkness? ²⁴⁵Was it a fierce tiger of crime, which could only be taken fighting hard with flashing fang and claw, or would it prove to be some skulking jackal, dangerous only to the weak and unguarded?

²⁴⁶In absolute silence we crouched amongst the bushes, waiting for whatever might come. ²⁴⁷At first the steps of a few belated villagers, or the sound of voices from the village, lightened our vigil; but one by one these interruptions died away and an absolute stillness fell upon us, save for the chimes of the distant church, which told us of the progress of the night, and for the rustle and whisper of a fine rain falling amid the foliage which roofed us in.

²⁴⁸Half-past two had chimed, and it was the darkest hour which precedes the dawn, when we all started as a low but sharp click came from the direction of the gate. ²⁴⁹Someone had entered the drive. ²⁵⁰Again there was a long silence, and I had begun to fear that it was a false alarm, when a stealthy step was heard upon the other side of the hut, and a moment later a metallic scraping and clinking. ²⁵¹The man was trying to force the lock! ²⁵²This time his skill was greater or his tool was better, for there was a sudden snap and the creak of the hinges. ²⁵³Then a match was struck, and next instant the steady light from a candle filled the interior of the hut. ²⁵⁴Through the gauze curtain our eyes were all riveted upon the scene within.

²⁵⁵The nocturnal visitor was a young man, frail and thin, with a black moustache which intensified the deadly pallor of his face. ²⁵⁶He could not have been much above twenty years of age. ²⁵⁷I have never seen any human being who appeared to be in such a pitiable fright, for his teeth were visibly chattering and he was shaking in every limb. ²⁵⁸He was dressed like a gentleman, in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with a cloth cap upon his head. ²⁵⁹We watched him staring round with frightened eyes. ²⁶⁰Then he laid the candle-end upon the table and disappeared from our view into one of the corners. ²⁶¹He returned with a large book, one of the log-books which formed a line upon the shelves. ²⁶²Leaning on the table he rapidly turned over the leaves of this volume until he came to the entry which he sought. ²⁶³Then, with an angry gesture of his clenched hand, he closed the book, replaced it in the corner, and put out the light. ²⁶⁴He had hardly turned to leave the hut when Hopkins's hand was on the fellow's collar, and I heard his loud gasp of terror as he understood that he was taken. ²⁶⁵The candle was re-lit, and there was our wretched captive shivering and cowering in the grasp of the detective. ²⁶⁶He sank down upon the sea-chest, and looked helplessly from one of us to the other.

²⁶⁷“Now, my fine fellow,” said Stanley Hopkins, “who are you, and what do you want here?”

²⁶⁸The man pulled himself together and faced us with an effort at self-composure.

²⁶⁹“You are detectives, I suppose?” said he. ²⁷⁰“You imagine I am connected with the death of Captain Peter Carey. ²⁷¹I assure you that I am innocent.”

²⁷²“We'll see about that,” said Hopkins. ²⁷³“First of all, what is your name?”

²⁷⁴“It is John Hopley Neligan.”

²⁷⁵I saw Holmes and Hopkins exchange a quick glance.

²⁷⁶“What are you doing here?”

²⁷⁷“Can I speak confidentially?”

²⁷⁸“No, certainly not.”

²⁷⁹“Why should I tell you?”

²⁸⁰“If you have no answer it may go badly with you at the trial.”

²⁸¹The young man winced.

²⁸²“Well, I will tell you,” he said. ²⁸³“Why should I not?” ²⁸⁴And yet I hate to think of this old scandal gaining a new lease of life. ²⁸⁵Did you ever hear of Dawson and Neligan?”

²⁸⁶I could see from Hopkins's face that he never had; but Holmes was keenly interested.

²⁸⁷“You mean the West-country bankers,” said he. ²⁸⁸“They failed for a million, ruined half the county families of Cornwall, and Neligan disappeared.”

²⁸⁹“Exactly. ²⁹⁰Neligan was my father.”

²⁹¹At last we were getting something positive, and yet it seemed a long gap between an absconding banker and Captain Peter Carey pinned against the wall with one of his own harpoons. ²⁹²We all listened intently to the young man's words.

²⁹³“It was my father who was really concerned. ²⁹⁴Dawson had retired. ²⁹⁵I was only ten years of age at the time, but I was old enough to feel the shame and horror of it all. ²⁹⁶It has always been said that my father stole all the securities and fled. ²⁹⁷It is not true. ²⁹⁸It was his belief that if he were given time in which to realize them all would be well and every creditor paid in full. ²⁹⁹He started in his little yacht for Norway just before the warrant was issued for his arrest. ³⁰⁰I can remember that last night when he bade farewell to my mother. ³⁰¹He left us a list of the securities he was taking, and he swore that he would come back with his honour cleared, and that none who had trusted him would suffer. ³⁰²Well, no word was ever heard from him again. ³⁰³Both the yacht and he vanished utterly. ³⁰⁴We believed, my mother and I, that he and it, with the securities that he had taken with him, were at the bottom of the sea. ³⁰⁵We had a faithful friend, however, who is a business man, and it was he who discovered some time ago that some of the securities which my father had with him have reappeared on the London market. ³⁰⁶You can imagine our amazement. ³⁰⁷I spent months in trying to trace them, and at last, after many doublings and difficulties, I discovered that the original seller had been Captain Peter Carey, the owner of this hut.

³⁰⁸“Naturally, I made some inquiries about the man. ³⁰⁹I found that he had been in command of a whaler which was due to return from the Arctic seas at the very time when my father was crossing to Norway. ³¹⁰The autumn of that year was a stormy one, and there was a long succession of southerly gales. ³¹¹My father's yacht may well have been blown to the north, and there met by Captain Peter Carey's ship. ³¹²If that were so, what had become of my father? ³¹³In any case, if I could prove from Peter Carey's evidence how these securities came on the market it would be a proof that my father had not sold them, and that he had no view to personal profit when he took them.

³¹⁴“I came down to Sussex with the intention of seeing the captain, but it was at this moment that his terrible death occurred. ³¹⁵I read at the inquest a description of his cabin, in which it stated that the old

log-books of his vessel were preserved in it. ³¹⁶It struck me that if I could see what occurred in the month of August, 1883, on board the Sea Unicorn, I might settle the mystery of my father's fate. ³¹⁶I tried last night to get at these log-books, but was unable to open the door. ³¹⁷To-night I tried again, and succeeded; but I find that the pages which deal with that month have been torn from the book. ³¹⁸It was at that moment I found myself a prisoner in your hands."

³¹⁹"Is that all?" asked Hopkins.

³²⁰"Yes, that is all." ³²¹His eyes shifted as he said it.

³²²"You have nothing else to tell us?"

³²³He hesitated.

³²⁴"No; there is nothing."

³²⁵"You have not been here before last night?"

³²⁶"No."

³²⁷"Then how do you account for that?" cried Hopkins, as he held up the damning note-book, with the initials of our prisoner on the first leaf and the blood-stain on the cover.

³²⁸The wretched man collapsed. ³²⁹He sank his face in his hands and trembled all over.

³³⁰"Where did you get it?" he groaned. ³³¹"I did not know. ³³²I thought I had lost it at the hotel."

³³³"That is enough," said Hopkins, sternly. ³³⁴"Whatever else you have to say you must say in court. ³³⁵You will walk down with me now to the police-station. ³³⁶Well, Mr. Holmes, I am very much obliged to you and to your friend for coming down to help me. ³³⁷As it turns out your presence was unnecessary, and I would have brought the case to this successful issue without you; but none the less I am very grateful. ³³⁸Rooms have been reserved for you at the Brambletye Hotel, so we can all walk down to the village together."

³³⁹"Well, Watson, what do you think of it?" asked Holmes, as we travelled back next morning.

³⁴⁰"I can see that you are not satisfied."

³⁴¹"Oh, yes, my dear Watson, I am perfectly satisfied. ³⁴²At the same time Stanley Hopkins's methods do not commend themselves to me. ³⁴³I am disappointed in Stanley Hopkins. ³⁴⁴I had hoped for better things from him. ³⁴⁵One should always look for a possible alternative and provide against it. ³⁴⁶It is the first rule of criminal investigation."

³⁴⁷"What, then, is the alternative?"

³⁴⁸"The line of investigation which I have myself been pursuing. ³⁴⁹It may give us nothing. ³⁵⁰I cannot tell. ³⁵¹But at least I shall follow it to the end."

³⁵²Several letters were waiting for Holmes at Baker Street. ³⁵³He snatched one of them up, opened it, and burst out into a triumphant chuckle of laughter.

³⁵⁴"Excellent, Watson. ³⁵⁵The alternative develops. ³⁵⁶Have you telegraph forms? ³⁵⁷Just write a couple of messages for me: 'Sumner, Shipping Agent, Ratcliff Highway. ³⁵⁸Send three men on, to arrive ten to-morrow morning.— ³⁵⁹Basil.' ³⁶⁰That's my name in those parts. ³⁶¹The other is: 'Inspector Stanley Hopkins, 46, Lord Street, Brixton. ³⁶²Come breakfast to-morrow at nine-thirty. ³⁶³Important. ³⁶⁴Wire if unable to come.— ³⁶⁵Sherlock Holmes.' ³⁶⁶There, Watson, this infernal case has haunted me for ten days. ³⁶⁷I hereby banish it completely from my presence. ³⁶⁸To-morrow I trust that we shall hear the last of it for ever."

³⁶⁹Sharp at the hour named Inspector Stanley Hopkins appeared, and we sat down together to the excellent breakfast which Mrs. Hudson had prepared. ³⁷⁰The young detective was in high spirits at his success.

³⁷¹“You really think that your solution must be correct?” asked Holmes.

³⁷²“I could not imagine a more complete case.”

³⁷³“It did not seem to me conclusive.”

³⁷⁴“You astonish me, Mr. Holmes. ³⁷⁵What more could one ask for?”

³⁷⁶“Does your explanation cover every point?”

³⁷⁷“Undoubtedly. ³⁷⁸I find that young Neligan arrived at the Brambletye Hotel on the very day of the crime. ³⁷⁹He came on the pretence of playing golf. ³⁸⁰His room was on the ground-floor, and he could get out when he liked. ³⁸¹That very night he went down to Woodman's Lee, saw Peter Carey at the hut, quarrelled with him, and killed him with the harpoon. ³⁸²Then, horrified by what he had done, he fled out of the hut, dropping the note-book which he had brought with him in order to question Peter Carey about these different securities. ³⁸³You may have observed that some of them were marked with ticks, and the others—the great majority—were not. ³⁸⁴Those which are ticked have been traced on the London market; but the others presumably were still in the possession of Carey, and young Neligan, according to his own account, was anxious to recover them in order to do the right thing by his father's creditors. ³⁸⁵After his flight he did not dare to approach the hut again for some time; but at last he forced himself to do so in order to obtain the information which he needed. ³⁸⁶Surely that is all simple and obvious?”

³⁸⁷Holmes smiled and shook his head.

³⁸⁸“It seems to me to have only one drawback, Hopkins, and that is that it is intrinsically impossible. ³⁸⁹Have you tried to drive a harpoon through a body? ³⁹⁰No? ³⁹¹Tut, tut, my dear sir, you must really pay attention to these details. ³⁹²My friend Watson could tell you that I spent a whole morning in that exercise. ³⁹³It is no easy matter, and requires a strong and practised arm. ³⁹⁴But this blow was delivered with such violence that the head of the weapon sank deep into the wall. ³⁹⁵Do you imagine that this anaemic youth was capable of so frightful an assault? ³⁹⁶Is he the man who hobnobbed in rum and water with Black Peter in the dead of the night? ³⁹⁷Was it his profile that was seen on the blind two nights before? ³⁹⁸No, no, Hopkins; it is another and a more formidable person for whom we must seek.”

³⁹⁹The detective's face had grown longer and longer during Holmes's speech. ⁴⁰⁰His hopes and his ambitions were all crumbling about him. ⁴⁰¹But he would not abandon his position without a struggle.

⁴⁰²“You can't deny that Neligan was present that night, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁰³The book will prove that. ⁴⁰⁴I fancy that I have evidence enough to satisfy a jury, even if you are able to pick a hole in it. ⁴⁰⁵Besides, Mr. Holmes, I have laid my hand upon my man. ⁴⁰⁶As to this terrible person of yours, where is he?”

⁴⁰⁷“I rather fancy that he is on the stair,” said Holmes, serenely. ⁴⁰⁸“I think, Watson, that you would do well to put that revolver where you can reach it.” ⁴⁰⁹He rose, and laid a written paper upon a side-table. ⁴¹⁰“Now we are ready,” said he.

⁴¹¹There had been some talking in gruff voices outside, and now Mrs. Hudson opened the door to say that there were three men inquiring for Captain Basil.

⁴¹²“Show them in one by one,” said Holmes.

⁴¹³The first who entered was a little ribston-pippin of a man, with ruddy cheeks and fluffy white side-whiskers. ⁴¹⁴Holmes had drawn a letter from his pocket.

⁴¹⁵“What name?” he asked.

⁴¹⁶“James Lancaster.”

⁴¹⁷“I am sorry, Lancaster, but the berth is full. ⁴¹⁸Here is half a sovereign for your trouble. ⁴¹⁹Just step into this room and wait there for a few minutes.”

⁴²⁰The second man was a long, dried-up creature, with lank hair and sallow cheeks. ⁴²¹His name was Hugh Pattins. ⁴²²He also received his dismissal, his half-sovereign, and the order to wait.

⁴²³The third applicant was a man of remarkable appearance. ⁴²⁴A fierce bull-dog face was framed in a tangle of hair and beard, and two bold dark eyes gleamed behind the cover of thick, tufted, overhung eyebrows. ⁴²⁵He saluted and stood sailor-fashion, turning his cap round in his hands.

⁴²⁶“Your name?” asked Holmes.

⁴²⁷“Patrick Cairns.”

⁴²⁸“Harpooner?”

⁴²⁹“Yes, sir. ⁴³⁰Twenty-six voyages.”

⁴³¹“Dundee, I suppose?”

⁴³²“Yes, sir.”

⁴³³“And ready to start with an exploring ship?”

⁴³⁴“Yes, sir.”

⁴³⁵“What wages?”

⁴³⁶“Eight pounds a month.”

⁴³⁷“Could you start at once?”

⁴³⁸“As soon as I get my kit.”

⁴³⁹“Have you your papers?”

⁴⁴⁰“Yes, sir.” ⁴⁴¹He took a sheaf of worn and greasy forms from his pocket. ⁴⁴²Holmes glanced over them and returned them.

⁴⁴³“You are just the man I want,” said he. ⁴⁴⁴“Here's the agreement on the side-table. ⁴⁴⁵If you sign it the whole matter will be settled.”

⁴⁴⁶The seaman lurched across the room and took up the pen.

⁴⁴⁷“Shall I sign here?” he asked, stooping over the table.

⁴⁴⁸Holmes leaned over his shoulder and passed both hands over his neck.

⁴⁴⁹“This will do,” said he.

⁴⁵⁰I heard a click of steel and a bellow like an enraged bull. ⁴⁵¹The next instant Holmes and the seaman were rolling on the ground together. ⁴⁵²He was a man of such gigantic strength that, even with the handcuffs which Holmes had so deftly fastened upon his wrists, he would have very quickly overpowered my friend had Hopkins and I not rushed to his rescue. ⁴⁵³Only when I pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver to his temple did he at last understand that resistance was vain. ⁴⁵⁴We lashed his ankles with cord and rose breathless from the struggle.

⁴⁵⁵“I must really apologize, Hopkins,” said Sherlock Holmes; “I fear that the scrambled eggs are cold. ⁴⁵⁶However, you will enjoy the rest of your breakfast all the better, will you not, for the thought that you have brought your case to a triumphant conclusion.”

⁴⁵⁷Stanley Hopkins was speechless with amazement.

⁴⁵⁸“I don't know what to say, Mr. Holmes,” he blurted out at last, with a very red face. ⁴⁵⁹“It seems to me that I have been making a fool of myself from the beginning. ⁴⁶⁰I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master. ⁴⁶¹Even now I see what you have done, but I don't know how you did it, or what it signifies.”

⁴⁶²“Well, well,” said Holmes, good-humouredly. ⁴⁶³“We all learn by experience, and your lesson this time is that you should never lose sight of the alternative. ⁴⁶⁴You were so absorbed in young Neligan that you could not spare a thought to Patrick Cairns, the true murderer of Peter Carey.”

⁴⁶⁵The hoarse voice of the seaman broke in on our conversation.

⁴⁶⁶“See here, mister,” said he, “I make no complaint of being man-handled in this fashion, but I would have you call things by their right names. ⁴⁶⁷You say I murdered Peter Carey; I say I killed Peter Carey, and there's all the difference. ⁴⁶⁸Maybe you don't believe what I say. ⁴⁶⁹Maybe you think I am just slinging you a yarn.”

⁴⁷⁰“Not at all,” said Holmes. ⁴⁷¹“Let us hear what you have to say.”

⁴⁷²“It's soon told, and, by the Lord, every word of it is truth. ⁴⁷³I knew Black Peter, and when he pulled out his knife I whipped a harpoon through him sharp, for I knew that it was him or me. ⁴⁷⁴That's how he died. ⁴⁷⁵You can call it murder. ⁴⁷⁶Anyhow, I'd as soon die with a rope round my neck as with Black Peter's knife in my heart.”

⁴⁷⁷“How came you there?” asked Holmes.

⁴⁷⁸“I'll tell it you from the beginning. ⁴⁷⁹Just sit me up a little so as I can speak easy. ⁴⁸⁰It was in '83 that it happened—August of that year. ⁴⁸¹Peter Carey was master of the Sea Unicorn, and I was spare harpooner. ⁴⁸²We were coming out of the ice-pack on our way home, with head winds and a week's southerly gale, when we picked up a little craft that had been blown north. ⁴⁸³There was one man on her—a landsman. ⁴⁸⁴The crew had thought she would founder, and had made for the Norwegian coast in the dinghy. ⁴⁸⁵I guess they were all drowned. ⁴⁸⁶Well, we took him on board, this man, and he and the skipper had some long talks in the cabin. ⁴⁸⁷All the baggage we took off with him was one tin box. ⁴⁸⁸So far as I know, the man's name was never mentioned, and on the second night he disappeared as if he had never been. ⁴⁸⁹It was given out that he had either thrown himself overboard or fallen overboard in the heavy weather that we were having. ⁴⁹⁰Only one man knew what had happened to him, and that was me, for with my own eyes I saw the skipper tip up his heels and put him over the rail in the middle watch of a dark night, two days before we sighted the Shetland lights.

⁴⁹¹“Well, I kept my knowledge to myself and waited to see what would come of it. ⁴⁹²When we got back to Scotland it was easily hushed up, and nobody asked any questions. ⁴⁹³A stranger died by an accident, and it was nobody's business to inquire. ⁴⁹⁴Shortly after Peter Carey gave up the sea, and it was long years before I could find where he was. ⁴⁹⁵I guessed that he had done the deed for the sake of what was in that tin box, and that he could afford now to pay me well for keeping my mouth shut.

⁴⁹⁶“I found out where he was through a sailor man that had met him in London, and down I went to squeeze him. ⁴⁹⁷The first night he was reasonable enough, and was ready to give me what would make me free of the sea for life. ⁴⁹⁸We were to fix it all two nights later. ⁴⁹⁹When I came I found him three parts drunk and in a vile temper. ⁵⁰⁰We sat down and we drank and we yarned about old times, but the more he drank the less I liked the look on his face. ⁵⁰¹I spotted that harpoon upon the wall, and I thought

I might need it before I was through. ⁵⁰²Then at last he broke out at me, spitting and cursing, with murder in his eyes and a great clasp-knife in his hand. ⁵⁰³He had not time to get it from the sheath before I had the harpoon through him. ⁵⁰⁴Heavens! what a yell he gave; and his face gets between me and my sleep! ⁵⁰⁵I stood there, with his blood splashing round me, and I waited for a bit; but all was quiet, so I took heart once more. ⁵⁰⁶I looked round, and there was the tin box on a shelf. ⁵⁰⁷I had as much right to it as Peter Carey, anyhow, so I took it with me and left the hut. ⁵⁰⁸Like a fool I left my baccy-pouch upon the table.

⁵⁰⁹“Now I'll tell you the queerest part of the whole story. ⁵¹⁰I had hardly got outside the hut when I heard someone coming, and I hid among the bushes. ⁵¹¹A man came slinking along, went into the hut, gave a cry as if he had seen a ghost, and legged it as hard as he could run until he was out of sight. ⁵¹²Who he was or what he wanted is more than I can tell. ⁵¹³For my part I walked ten miles, got a train at Tunbridge Wells, and so reached London, and no one the wiser.

⁵¹⁴“Well, when I came to examine the box I found there was no money in it, and nothing but papers that I would not dare to sell. ⁵¹⁵I had lost my hold on Black Peter, and was stranded in London without a shilling. ⁵¹⁶There was only my trade left. ⁵¹⁷I saw these advertisements about harpooners and high wages, so I went to the shipping agents, and they sent me here. ⁵¹⁸That's all I know, and I say again that if I killed Black Peter the law should give me thanks, for I saved them the price of a hempen rope.”

⁵¹⁹“A very clear statement,” said Holmes, rising and lighting his pipe. ⁵²⁰“I think, Hopkins, that you should lose no time in conveying your prisoner to a place of safety. ⁵²¹This room is not well adapted for a cell, and Mr. Patrick Cairns occupies too large a proportion of our carpet.”

⁵²²“Mr. Holmes,” said Hopkins, “I do not know how to express my gratitude. ⁵²³Even now I do not understand how you attained this result.”

⁵²⁴“Simply by having the good fortune to get the right clue from the beginning. ⁵²⁵It is very possible if I had known about this note-book it might have led away my thoughts, as it did yours. ⁵²⁶But all I heard pointed in the one direction. ⁵²⁷The amazing strength, the skill in the use of the harpoon, the rum and water, the seal-skin tobacco-pouch, with the coarse tobacco—all these pointed to a seaman, and one who had been a whaler. ⁵²⁸I was convinced that the initials ‘P.C.’ upon the pouch were a coincidence, and not those of Peter Carey, since he seldom smoked, and no pipe was found in his cabin. ⁵²⁹You remember that I asked whether whisky and brandy were in the cabin. ⁵³⁰You said they were. ⁵³¹How many landsmen are there who would drink rum when they could get these other spirits? ⁵³²Yes, I was certain it was a seaman.”

⁵³³“And how did you find him?”

⁵³⁴“My dear sir, the problem had become a very simple one. ⁵³⁵If it were a seaman, it could only be a seaman who had been with him on the Sea Unicorn. ⁵³⁶So far as I could learn he had sailed in no other ship. ⁵³⁷I spent three days in wiring to Dundee, and at the end of that time I had ascertained the names of the crew of the Sea Unicorn in 1883. ⁵³⁸When I found Patrick Cairns among the harpooners my research was nearing its end. ⁵³⁹I argued that the man was probably in London, and that he would desire to leave the country for a time. ⁵⁴⁰I therefore spent some days in the East-end, devised an Arctic expedition, put forth tempting terms for harpooners who would serve under Captain Basil—and behold the result!”

⁵⁴¹“Wonderful!” cried Hopkins. ⁵⁴²“Wonderful!”

⁵⁴³“You must obtain the release of young Neligan as soon as possible,” said Holmes. ⁵⁴⁴“I confess that I think you owe him some apology. ⁵⁴⁵The tin box must be returned to him, but, of course, the securities which Peter Carey has sold are lost for ever. ⁵⁴⁶There's the cab, Hopkins, and you can remove your man.

⁵⁴⁷If you want me for the trial, my address and that of Watson will be somewhere in Norway—I'll send particulars later.”

The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

¹It is years since the incidents of which I speak took place, and yet it is with diffidence that I allude to them. ²For a long time, even with the utmost discretion and reticence, it would have been impossible to make the facts public; but now the principal person concerned is beyond the reach of human law, and with due suppression the story may be told in such fashion as to injure no one. ³It records an absolutely unique experience in the career both of Mr. Sherlock Holmes and of myself. ⁴The reader will excuse me if I conceal the date or any other fact by which he might trace the actual occurrence.

⁵We had been out for one of our evening rambles, Holmes and I, and had returned about six o'clock on a cold, frosty winter's evening. ⁶As Holmes turned up the lamp the light fell upon a card on the table. ⁷He glanced at it, and then, with an ejaculation of disgust, threw it on the floor. ⁸I picked it up and read:—

⁹Charles Augustus Milverton,

¹⁰Appledore Towers,

¹¹Hampstead.

¹²Agent.

¹³“Who is he?” I asked.

¹⁴“The worst man in London,” Holmes answered, as he sat down and stretched his legs before the fire.

¹⁵“Is anything on the back of the card?”

¹⁶I turned it over.

¹⁷“Will call at 6.30—C.A.M.,” I read.

¹⁸“Hum! ¹⁹He's about due. ²⁰Do you feel a creeping, shrinking sensation, Watson, when you stand before the serpents in the Zoo and see the slithery, gliding, venomous creatures, with their deadly eyes and wicked, flattened faces? ²¹Well, that's how Milverton impresses me. ²²I've had to do with fifty murderers in my career, but the worst of them never gave me the repulsion which I have for this fellow. ²³And yet I can't get out of doing business with him—indeed, he is here at my invitation.”

²⁴“But who is he?”

²⁵“I'll tell you, Watson. ²⁶He is the king of all the blackmailers. ²⁷Heaven help the man, and still more the woman, whose secret and reputation come into the power of Milverton. ²⁸With a smiling face and a heart of marble he will squeeze and squeeze until he has drained them dry. ²⁹The fellow is a genius in his way, and would have made his mark in some more savoury trade. ³⁰His method is as follows: ³¹He allows it to be known that he is prepared to pay very high sums for letters which compromise people of wealth or position. ³²He receives these wares not only from treacherous valets or maids, but frequently from genteel ruffians who have gained the confidence and affection of trusting women. ³³He deals with no niggard hand. ³⁴I happen to know that he paid seven hundred pounds to a footman for a note two lines in length, and that the ruin of a noble family was the result. ³⁵Everything which is in the market goes to Milverton, and there are hundreds in this great city who turn white at his name. ³⁶No one knows where his grip may fall, for he is far too rich and far too cunning to work from hand to mouth. ³⁷He will hold a card back for years in order to play it at the moment when the stake is best worth winning. ³⁸I have said that he is the worst man in London, and I would ask you how could one compare the ruffian who in hot blood bludgeons his mate with this man, who methodically and at his leisure tortures the soul and wrings the nerves in order to add to his already swollen money-bags?”

³⁹I had seldom heard my friend speak with such intensity of feeling.

⁴⁰“But surely,” said I, “the fellow must be within the grasp of the law?”

⁴¹“Technically, no doubt, but practically not. ⁴²What would it profit a woman, for example, to get him a few months' imprisonment if her own ruin must immediately follow? ⁴³His victims dare not hit back. ⁴⁴If ever he blackmailed an innocent person, then, indeed, we should have him; but he is as cunning as the Evil One. ⁴⁵No, no; we must find other ways to fight him.”

⁴⁶“And why is he here?”

⁴⁷“Because an illustrious client has placed her piteous case in my hands. ⁴⁸It is the Lady Eva Brackwell, the most beautiful debutante of last season. ⁴⁹She is to be married in a fortnight to the Earl of Dovercourt. ⁵⁰This fiend has several imprudent letters—imprudent, Watson, nothing worse—which were written to an impecunious young squire in the country. ⁵¹They would suffice to break off the match. ⁵²Milverton will send the letters to the Earl unless a large sum of money is paid him. ⁵³I have been commissioned to meet him, and—to make the best terms I can.”

⁵⁴At that instant there was a clatter and a rattle in the street below. ⁵⁵Looking down I saw a stately carriage and pair, the brilliant lamps gleaming on the glossy haunches of the noble chestnuts. ⁵⁶A footman opened the door, and a small, stout man in a shaggy astrachan overcoat descended. ⁵⁷A minute later he was in the room.

⁵⁸Charles Augustus Milverton was a man of fifty, with a large, intellectual head, a round, plump, hairless face, a perpetual frozen smile, and two keen grey eyes, which gleamed brightly from behind broad, golden-rimmed glasses. ⁵⁹There was something of Mr. Pickwick's benevolence in his appearance, marred only by the insincerity of the fixed smile and by the hard glitter of those restless and penetrating eyes. ⁶⁰His voice was as smooth and suave as his countenance, as he advanced with a plump little hand extended, murmuring his regret for having missed us at his first visit. ⁶¹Holmes disregarded the outstretched hand and looked at him with a face of granite. ⁶²Milverton's smile broadened; he shrugged his shoulders, removed his overcoat, folded it with great deliberation over the back of a chair, and then took a seat.

⁶³“This gentleman?” said he, with a wave in my direction. ⁶⁴“Is it discreet? ⁶⁵Is it right?”

⁶⁶“Dr. Watson is my friend and partner.”

⁶⁷“Very good, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁸It is only in your client's interests that I protested. ⁶⁹The matter is so very delicate—”

⁷⁰“Dr. Watson has already heard of it.”

⁷¹“Then we can proceed to business. ⁷²You say that you are acting for Lady Eva. ⁷³Has she empowered you to accept my terms?”

⁷⁴“What are your terms?”

⁷⁵“Seven thousand pounds.”

⁷⁶“And the alternative?”

⁷⁷“My dear sir, it is painful for me to discuss it; but if the money is not paid on the 14th there certainly will be no marriage on the 18th.” ⁷⁸His insufferable smile was more complacent than ever.

⁷⁹Holmes thought for a little.

⁸⁰“You appear to me,” he said, at last, “to be taking matters too much for granted. ⁸¹I am, of course, familiar with the contents of these letters. ⁸²My client will certainly do what I may advise. ⁸³I shall counsel her to tell her future husband the whole story and to trust to his generosity.”

⁸⁴Milverton chuckled.

⁸⁵“You evidently do not know the Earl,” said he.

⁸⁶From the baffled look upon Holmes's face I could see clearly that he did.

⁸⁷“What harm is there in the letters?” he asked.

⁸⁸“They are sprightly—very sprightly,” Milverton answered. ⁸⁹“The lady was a charming correspondent. ⁹⁰But I can assure you that the Earl of Dovercourt would fail to appreciate them. ⁹¹However, since you think otherwise, we will let it rest at that. ⁹²It is purely a matter of business. ⁹³If you think that it is in the best interests of your client that these letters should be placed in the hands of the Earl, then you would indeed be foolish to pay so large a sum of money to regain them.” ⁹⁴He rose and seized his astrachan coat.

⁹⁵Holmes was grey with anger and mortification.

⁹⁶“Wait a little,” he said. ⁹⁷“You go too fast. ⁹⁸We would certainly make every effort to avoid scandal in so delicate a matter.”

⁹⁹Milverton relapsed into his chair.

¹⁰⁰“I was sure that you would see it in that light,” he purred.

¹⁰¹“At the same time,” Holmes continued, “Lady Eva is not a wealthy woman. ¹⁰²I assure you that two thousand pounds would be a drain upon her resources, and that the sum you name is utterly beyond her power. ¹⁰³I beg, therefore, that you will moderate your demands, and that you will return the letters at the price I indicate, which is, I assure you, the highest that you can get.”

¹⁰⁴Milverton's smile broadened and his eyes twinkled humorously.

¹⁰⁵“I am aware that what you say is true about the lady's resources,” said he. ¹⁰⁶“At the same time, you must admit that the occasion of a lady's marriage is a very suitable time for her friends and relatives to make some little effort upon her behalf. ¹⁰⁷They may hesitate as to an acceptable wedding present. ¹⁰⁸Let me assure them that this little bundle of letters would give more joy than all the candelabra and butterdishes in London.”

¹⁰⁹“It is impossible,” said Holmes.

¹¹⁰“Dear me, dear me, how unfortunate!” cried Milverton, taking out a bulky pocket-book. ¹¹¹“I cannot help thinking that ladies are ill-advised in not making an effort. ¹¹²Look at this!” ¹¹³He held up a little note with a coat-of-arms upon the envelope. ¹¹⁴“That belongs to—well, perhaps it is hardly fair to tell the name until to-morrow morning. ¹¹⁵But at that time it will be in the hands of the lady's husband. ¹¹⁶And all because she will not find a beggarly sum which she could get by turning her diamonds into paste. ¹¹⁷It is such a pity. ¹¹⁸Now, you remember the sudden end of the engagement between the Honourable Miss Miles and Colonel Dorking? ¹¹⁹Only two days before the wedding there was a paragraph in the Morning Post to say that it was all off. ¹²⁰And why? ¹²¹It is almost incredible, but the absurd sum of twelve hundred pounds would have settled the whole question. ¹²²Is it not pitiful? ¹²³And here I find you, a man of sense, boggling about terms when your client's future and honour are at stake. ¹²⁴You surprise me, Mr. Holmes.”

¹²⁵“What I say is true,” Holmes answered. ¹²⁶“The money cannot be found. ¹²⁷Surely it is better for you to take the substantial sum which I offer than to ruin this woman's career, which can profit you in no way?”

¹²⁸“There you make a mistake, Mr. Holmes. ¹²⁹An exposure would profit me indirectly to a considerable extent. ¹³⁰I have eight or ten similar cases maturing. ¹³¹If it was circulated among them that I had made a severe example of the Lady Eva I should find all of them much more open to reason. ¹³²You see my point?”

¹³³Holmes sprang from his chair.

¹³⁴“Get behind him, Watson! ¹³⁵Don't let him out! ¹³⁶Now, sir, let us see the contents of that note-book.”

¹³⁷Milverton had glided as quick as a rat to the side of the room, and stood with his back against the wall.

¹³⁸“Mr. Holmes, Mr. Holmes,” he said, turning the front of his coat and exhibiting the butt of a large revolver, which projected from the inside pocket. ¹³⁹“I have been expecting you to do something original. ¹⁴⁰This has been done so often, and what good has ever come from it? ¹⁴¹I assure you that I am armed to the teeth, and I am perfectly prepared to use my weapons, knowing that the law will support me. ¹⁴²Besides, your supposition that I would bring the letters here in a note-book is entirely mistaken. ¹⁴³I would do nothing so foolish. ¹⁴⁴And now, gentlemen, I have one or two little interviews this evening, and it is a long drive to Hampstead.” ¹⁴⁵He stepped forward, took up his coat, laid his hand on his revolver, and turned to the door. ¹⁴⁶I picked up a chair, but Holmes shook his head and I laid it down again. ¹⁴⁷With bow, a smile, and a twinkle Milverton was out of the room, and a few moments after we heard the slam of the carriage door and the rattle of the wheels as he drove away.

¹⁴⁸Holmes sat motionless by the fire, his hands buried deep in his trouser pockets, his chin sunk upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon the glowing embers. ¹⁴⁹For half an hour he was silent and still. ¹⁵⁰Then, with the gesture of a man who has taken his decision, he sprang to his feet and passed into his bedroom. ¹⁵¹A little later a rakish young workman with a goatee beard and a swagger lit his clay pipe at the lamp before descending into the street. ¹⁵²“I'll be back some time, Watson,” said he, and vanished into the night. ¹⁵³I understood that he had opened his campaign against Charles Augustus Milverton; but I little dreamed the strange shape which that campaign was destined to take.

¹⁵⁴For some days Holmes came and went at all hours in this attire, but beyond a remark that his time was spent at Hampstead, and that it was not wasted, I knew nothing of what he was doing. ¹⁵⁵At last, however, on a wild, tempestuous evening, when the wind screamed and rattled against the windows, he returned from his last expedition, and having removed his disguise he sat before the fire and laughed heartily in his silent inward fashion.

¹⁵⁶“You would not call me a marrying man, Watson?”

¹⁵⁷“No, indeed!”

¹⁵⁸“You'll be interested to hear that I am engaged.”

¹⁵⁹“My dear fellow! ¹⁶⁰I congrat—”

¹⁶¹“To Milverton's housemaid.”

¹⁶²“Good heavens, Holmes!”

¹⁶³“I wanted information, Watson.”

¹⁶⁴“Surely you have gone too far?”

¹⁶⁵“It was a most necessary step. ¹⁶⁶I am a plumber with a rising business, Escott by name. ¹⁶⁷I have walked out with her each evening, and I have talked with her. ¹⁶⁸Good heavens, those talks! ¹⁶⁹However, I have got all I wanted. ¹⁷⁰I know Milverton's house as I know the palm of my hand.”

¹⁷¹“But the girl, Holmes?”

¹⁷²He shrugged his shoulders.

¹⁷³“You can't help it, my dear Watson. ¹⁷⁴You must play your cards as best you can when such a stake is on the table. ¹⁷⁵However, I rejoice to say that I have a hated rival who will certainly cut me out the instant that my back is turned. ¹⁷⁶What a splendid night it is!”

¹⁷⁷“You like this weather?”

¹⁷⁸“It suits my purpose. ¹⁷⁹Watson, I mean to burgle Milverton's house to-night.”

¹⁸⁰I had a catching of the breath, and my skin went cold at the words, which were slowly uttered in a tone of concentrated resolution. ¹⁸¹As a flash of lightning in the night shows up in an instant every detail of a wide landscape, so at one glance I seemed to see every possible result of such an action—the detection, the capture, the honoured career ending in irreparable failure and disgrace, my friend himself lying at the mercy of the odious Milverton.

¹⁸²“For Heaven's sake, Holmes, think what you are doing,” I cried.

¹⁸³“My dear fellow, I have given it every consideration. ¹⁸⁴I am never precipitate in my actions, nor would I adopt so energetic and indeed so dangerous a course if any other were possible. ¹⁸⁵Let us look at the matter clearly and fairly. ¹⁸⁶I suppose that you will admit that the action is morally justifiable, though technically criminal. ¹⁸⁷To burgle his house is no more than to forcibly take his pocket-book—an action in which you were prepared to aid me.”

¹⁸⁸I turned it over in my mind.

¹⁸⁹“Yes,” I said; “it is morally justifiable so long as our object is to take no articles save those which are used for an illegal purpose.”

¹⁹⁰“Exactly. ¹⁹¹Since it is morally justifiable I have only to consider the question of personal risk. ¹⁹²Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon this when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?”

¹⁹³“You will be in such a false position.”

¹⁹⁴“Well, that is part of the risk. ¹⁹⁵There is no other possible way of regaining these letters. ¹⁹⁶The unfortunate lady has not the money, and there are none of her people in whom she could confide. ¹⁹⁷To-morrow is the last day of grace, and unless we can get the letters to-night this villain will be as good as his word and will bring about her ruin. ¹⁹⁸I must, therefore, abandon my client to her fate or I must play this last card. ¹⁹⁹Between ourselves, Watson, it's a sporting duel between this fellow Milverton and me. ²⁰⁰He had, as you saw, the best of the first exchanges; but my self-respect and my reputation are concerned to fight it to a finish.”

²⁰¹“Well, I don't like it; but I suppose it must be,” said I. ²⁰²“When do we start?”

²⁰³“You are not coming.”

²⁰⁴“Then you are not going,” said I. ²⁰⁵“I give you my word of honour—and I never broke it in my life—that I will take a cab straight to the police-station and give you away unless you let me share this adventure with you.”

²⁰⁶“You can't help me.”

²⁰⁷“How do you know that? ²⁰⁸You can't tell what may happen. ²⁰⁹Anyway, my resolution is taken. ²¹⁰Other people beside you have self-respect and even reputations.”

²¹¹Holmes had looked annoyed, but his brow cleared, and he clapped me on the shoulder.

²¹²“Well, well, my dear fellow, be it so. ²¹³We have shared the same room for some years, and it would be amusing if we ended by sharing the same cell. ²¹⁴You know, Watson, I don't mind confessing to you that I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal. ²¹⁵This is the chance of my lifetime in that direction. ²¹⁶See here!” ²¹⁷He took a neat little leather case out of a drawer, and opening it he exhibited a number of shining instruments. ²¹⁸“This is a first-class, up-to-date burgling kit, with nickel-plated jemmy, diamond-tipped glass-cutter, adaptable keys, and every modern improvement which the march of civilization demands. ²¹⁹Here, too, is my dark lantern. ²²⁰Everything is in order. ²²¹Have you a pair of silent shoes?”

²²²“I have rubber-soled tennis shoes.”

²²³“Excellent. ²²⁴And a mask?”

²²⁵“I can make a couple out of black silk.”

²²⁶“I can see that you have a strong natural turn for this sort of thing. ²²⁷Very good; do you make the masks. ²²⁸We shall have some cold supper before we start. ²²⁹It is now nine-thirty. ²³⁰At eleven we shall drive as far as Church Row. ²³¹It is a quarter of an hour's walk from there to Appledore Towers. ²³²We shall be at work before midnight. ²³³Milverton is a heavy sleeper and retires punctually at ten-thirty. ²³⁴With any luck we should be back here by two, with the Lady Eva's letters in my pocket.”

²³⁵Holmes and I put on our dress-clothes, so that we might appear to be two theatre-goers homeward bound. ²³⁶In Oxford Street we picked up a hansom and drove to an address in Hampstead. ²³⁷Here we paid off our cab, and with our great-coats buttoned up, for it was bitterly cold and the wind seemed to blow through us, we walked along the edge of the Heath.

²³⁸“It's a business that needs delicate treatment,” said Holmes. ²³⁹“These documents are contained in a safe in the fellow's study, and the study is the ante-room of his bed-chamber. ²⁴⁰On the other hand, like all these stout, little men who do themselves well, he is a plethoric sleeper. ²⁴¹Agatha—that's my fiancée—says it is a joke in the servants' hall that it's impossible to wake the master. ²⁴²He has a secretary who is devoted to his interests and never budes from the study all day. ²⁴³That's why we are going at night. ²⁴⁴Then he has a beast of a dog which roams the garden. ²⁴⁵I met Agatha late the last two evenings, and she locks the brute up so as to give me a clear run. ²⁴⁶This is the house, this big one in its own grounds. ²⁴⁷Through the gate—now to the right among the laurels. ²⁴⁸We might put on our masks here, I think. ²⁴⁹You see, there is not a glimmer of light in any of the windows, and everything is working splendidly.”

²⁵⁰With our black silk face-coverings, which turned us into two of the most truculent figures in London, we stole up to the silent, gloomy house. ²⁵¹A sort of tiled veranda extended along one side of it, lined by several windows and two doors.

²⁵²“That's his bedroom,” Holmes whispered. ²⁵³“This door opens straight into the study. ²⁵⁴It would suit us best, but it is bolted as well as locked, and we should make too much noise getting in. ²⁵⁵Come round here. ²⁵⁶There's a greenhouse which opens into the drawing-room.”

²⁵⁷The place was locked, but Holmes removed a circle of glass and turned the key from the inside. ²⁵⁸An instant afterwards he had closed the door behind us, and we had become felons in the eyes of the law. ²⁵⁹The thick, warm air of the conservatory and the rich, choking fragrance of exotic plants took us by the throat. ²⁶⁰He seized my hand in the darkness and led me swiftly past banks of shrubs which brushed against our faces. ²⁶¹Holmes had remarkable powers, carefully cultivated, of seeing in the dark. ²⁶²Still

holding my hand in one of his he opened a door, and I was vaguely conscious that we had entered a large room in which a cigar had been smoked not long before. ²⁶³He felt his way among the furniture, opened another door, and closed it behind us. ²⁶⁴Putting out my hand I felt several coats hanging from the wall, and I understood that I was in a passage. ²⁶⁵We passed along it, and Holmes very gently opened a door upon the right-hand side. ²⁶⁶Something rushed out at us and my heart sprang into my mouth, but I could have laughed when I realized that it was the cat. ²⁶⁷A fire was burning in this new room, and again the air was heavy with tobacco smoke. ²⁶⁸Holmes entered on tiptoe, waited for me to follow, and then very gently closed the door. ²⁶⁹We were in Milverton's study, and a portiere at the farther side showed the entrance to his bedroom.

²⁷⁰It was a good fire, and the room was illuminated by it. ²⁷¹Near the door I saw the gleam of an electric switch, but it was unnecessary, even if it had been safe, to turn it on. ²⁷²At one side of the fireplace was a heavy curtain, which covered the bay window we had seen from outside. ²⁷³On the other side was the door which communicated with the veranda. ²⁷⁴A desk stood in the centre, with a turning chair of shining red leather. ²⁷⁵Opposite was a large bookcase, with a marble bust of Athene on the top. ²⁷⁶In the corner between the bookcase and the wall there stood a tall green safe, the firelight flashing back from the polished brass knobs upon its face. ²⁷⁷Holmes stole across and looked at it. ²⁷⁸Then he crept to the door of the bedroom, and stood with slanting head listening intently. ²⁷⁹No sound came from within. ²⁸⁰Meanwhile it had struck me that it would be wise to secure our retreat through the outer door, so I examined it. ²⁸¹To my amazement it was neither locked nor bolted! ²⁸²I touched Holmes on the arm, and he turned his masked face in that direction. ²⁸³I saw him start, and he was evidently as surprised as I.

²⁸⁴"I don't like it," he whispered, putting his lips to my very ear. ²⁸⁵"I can't quite make it out. ²⁸⁶Anyhow, we have no time to lose."

²⁸⁷"Can I do anything?"

²⁸⁸"Yes; stand by the door. ²⁸⁹If you hear anyone come, bolt it on the inside, and we can get away as we came. ²⁹⁰If they come the other way, we can get through the door if our job is done, or hide behind these window curtains if it is not. ²⁹¹Do you understand?"

²⁹²I nodded and stood by the door. ²⁹³My first feeling of fear had passed away, and I thrilled now with a keener zest than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defiers. ²⁹⁴The high object of our mission, the consciousness that it was unselfish and chivalrous, the villainous character of our opponent, all added to the sporting interest of the adventure. ²⁹⁵Far from feeling guilty, I rejoiced and exulted in our dangers. ²⁹⁶With a glow of admiration I watched Holmes unrolling his case of instruments and choosing his tool with the calm, scientific accuracy of a surgeon who performs a delicate operation. ²⁹⁷I knew that the opening of safes was a particular hobby with him, and I understood the joy which it gave him to be confronted with this green and gold monster, the dragon which held in its maw the reputations of many fair ladies. ²⁹⁸Turning up the cuffs of his dress-coat—he had placed his overcoat on a chair—Holmes laid out two drills, a jemmy, and several skeleton keys. ²⁹⁹I stood at the centre door with my eyes glancing at each of the others, ready for any emergency; though, indeed, my plans were somewhat vague as to what I should do if we were interrupted. ³⁰⁰For half an hour Holmes worked with concentrated energy, laying down one tool, picking up another, handling each with the strength and delicacy of the trained mechanic. ³⁰¹Finally I heard a click, the broad green door swung open, and inside I had a glimpse of a number of paper packets, each tied, sealed, and inscribed. ³⁰²Holmes picked one out, but it was hard to read by the flickering fire, and he drew out his little dark lantern, for it was too dangerous, with Milverton in the next room, to switch on the electric light. ³⁰³Suddenly I saw him halt, listen intently, and then in an instant he had swung the door of the safe to, picked up his coat, stuffed his tools into the pockets, and darted behind the window curtain, motioning me to do the same.

³⁰⁴It was only when I had joined him there that I heard what had alarmed his quicker senses. ³⁰⁵There was a noise somewhere within the house. ³⁰⁶A door slammed in the distance. ³⁰⁷Then a confused, dull murmur broke itself into the measured thud of heavy footsteps rapidly approaching. ³⁰⁸They were in the passage outside the room. ³⁰⁹They paused at the door. ³¹⁰The door opened. ³¹¹There was a sharp snick as the electric light was turned on. ³¹²The door closed once more, and the pungent reek of a strong cigar was borne to our nostrils. ³¹³Then the footsteps continued backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, within a few yards of us. ³¹⁴Finally, there was a creak from a chair, and the footsteps ceased. ³¹⁵Then a key clicked in a lock and I heard the rustle of papers.

³¹⁶So far I had not dared to look out, but now I gently parted the division of the curtains in front of me and peeped through. ³¹⁷From the pressure of Holmes's shoulder against mine I knew that he was sharing my observations. ³¹⁸Right in front of us, and almost within our reach, was the broad, rounded back of Milverton. ³¹⁹It was evident that we had entirely miscalculated his movements, that he had never been to his bedroom, but that he had been sitting up in some smoking or billiard room in the farther wing of the house, the windows of which we had not seen. ³²⁰His broad, grizzled head, with its shining patch of baldness, was in the immediate foreground of our vision. ³²¹He was leaning far back in the red leather chair, his legs outstretched, a long black cigar projecting at an angle from his mouth. ³²²He wore a semi-military smoking jacket, claret-coloured, with a black velvet collar. ³²³In his hand he held a long legal document, which he was reading in an indolent fashion, blowing rings of tobacco smoke from his lips as he did so. ³²⁴There was no promise of a speedy departure in his composed bearing and his comfortable attitude.

³²⁵I felt Holmes's hand steal into mine and give me a reassuring shake, as if to say that the situation was within his powers and that he was easy in his mind. ³²⁶I was not sure whether he had seen what was only too obvious from my position, that the door of the safe was imperfectly closed, and that Milverton might at any moment observe it. ³²⁷In my own mind I had determined that if I were sure, from the rigidity of his gaze, that it had caught his eye, I would at once spring out, throw my great-coat over his head, pinion him, and leave the rest to Holmes. ³²⁸But Milverton never looked up. ³²⁹He was languidly interested by the papers in his hand, and page after page was turned as he followed the argument of the lawyer. ³³⁰At least, I thought, when he has finished the document and the cigar he will go to his room; but before he had reached the end of either there came a remarkable development which turned our thoughts into quite another channel.

³³¹Several times I had observed that Milverton looked at his watch, and once he had risen and sat down again, with a gesture of impatience. ³³²The idea, however, that he might have an appointment at so strange an hour never occurred to me until a faint sound reached my ears from the veranda outside. ³³³Milverton dropped his papers and sat rigid in his chair. ³³⁴The sound was repeated, and then there came a gentle tap at the door. ³³⁵Milverton rose and opened it.

³³⁶"Well," said he, curtly, "you are nearly half an hour late."

³³⁷So this was the explanation of the unlocked door and of the nocturnal vigil of Milverton. ³³⁸There was the gentle rustle of a woman's dress. ³³⁹I had closed the slit between the curtains as Milverton's face had turned in our direction, but now I ventured very carefully to open it once more. ³⁴⁰He had resumed his seat, the cigar still projecting at an insolent angle from the corner of his mouth. ³⁴¹In front of him, in the full glare of the electric light, there stood a tall, slim, dark woman, a veil over her face, a mantle drawn round her chin. ³⁴²Her breath came quick and fast, and every inch of the lithe figure was quivering with strong emotion.

³⁴³"Well," said Milverton, "you've made me lose a good night's rest, my dear. ³⁴⁴I hope you'll prove worth it. ³⁴⁵You couldn't come any other time—eh?"

³⁴⁶The woman shook her head.

³⁴⁷“Well, if you couldn't you couldn't. ³⁴⁸If the Countess is a hard mistress you have your chance to get level with her now. ³⁴⁹Bless the girl, what are you shivering about? ³⁵⁰That's right! ³⁵¹Pull yourself together! ³⁵²Now, let us get down to business.” ³⁵³He took a note from the drawer of his desk. ³⁵⁴“You say that you have five letters which compromise the Countess d'Albert. ³⁵⁵You want to sell them. ³⁵⁶I want to buy them. ³⁵⁷So far so good. ³⁵⁸It only remains to fix a price. ³⁵⁹I should want to inspect the letters, of course. ³⁶⁰If they are really good specimens— ³⁶¹Great heavens, is it you?”

³⁶²The woman without a word had raised her veil and dropped the mantle from her chin. ³⁶³It was a dark, handsome, clear-cut face which confronted Milverton, a face with a curved nose, strong, dark eyebrows shading hard, glittering eyes, and a straight, thin-lipped mouth set in a dangerous smile.

³⁶⁴“It is I,” she said; “the woman whose life you have ruined.”

³⁶⁵Milverton laughed, but fear vibrated in his voice. ³⁶⁶“You were so very obstinate,” said he. ³⁶⁷“Why did you drive me to such extremities? ³⁶⁸I assure you I wouldn't hurt a fly of my own accord, but every man has his business, and what was I to do? ³⁶⁹I put the price well within your means. ³⁷⁰You would not pay.”

³⁷¹“So you sent the letters to my husband, and he—the noblest gentleman that ever lived, a man whose boots I was never worthy to lace—he broke his gallant heart and died. ³⁷²You remember that last night when I came through that door I begged and prayed you for mercy, and you laughed in my face as you are trying to laugh now, only your coward heart cannot keep your lips from twitching? ³⁷³Yes, you never thought to see me here again, but it was that night which taught me how I could meet you face to face, and alone. ³⁷⁴Well, Charles Milverton, what have you to say?”

³⁷⁵“Don't imagine that you can bully me,” said he, rising to his feet. ³⁷⁶“I have only to raise my voice, and I could call my servants and have you arrested. ³⁷⁷But I will make allowance for your natural anger. ³⁷⁸Leave the room at once as you came, and I will say no more.”

³⁷⁹The woman stood with her hand buried in her bosom, and the same deadly smile on her thin lips.

³⁸⁰“You will ruin no more lives as you ruined mine. ³⁸¹You will wring no more hearts as you wrung mine. ³⁸²I will free the world of a poisonous thing. ³⁸³Take that, you hound, and that!—and that!—and that!”

³⁸⁴She had drawn a little, gleaming revolver, and emptied barrel after barrel into Milverton's body, the muzzle within two feet of his shirt front. ³⁸⁵He shrank away and then fell forward upon the table, coughing furiously and clawing among the papers. ³⁸⁶Then he staggered to his feet, received another shot, and rolled upon the floor. ³⁸⁷“You've done me,” he cried, and lay still. ³⁸⁸The woman looked at him intently and ground her heel into his upturned face. ³⁸⁹She looked again, but there was no sound or movement. ³⁹⁰I heard a sharp rustle, the night air blew into the heated room, and the avenger was gone.

³⁹¹No interference upon our part could have saved the man from his fate; but as the woman poured bullet after bullet into Milverton's shrinking body I was about to spring out, when I felt Holmes's cold, strong grasp upon my wrist. ³⁹²I understood the whole argument of that firm, restraining grip—that it was no affair of ours; that justice had overtaken a villain; that we had our own duties and our own objects which were not to be lost sight of. ³⁹³But hardly had the woman rushed from the room when Holmes, with swift, silent steps, was over at the other door. ³⁹⁴He turned the key in the lock. ³⁹⁵At the same instant we heard voices in the house and the sound of hurrying feet. ³⁹⁶The revolver shots had roused the household. ³⁹⁷With perfect coolness Holmes slipped across to the safe, filled his two arms with bundles of letters, and poured them all into the fire. ³⁹⁸Again and again he did it, until the safe was empty. ³⁹⁹Someone turned the handle and beat upon the outside of the door. ⁴⁰⁰Holmes looked swiftly round. ⁴⁰¹The letter which had been the messenger of death for Milverton lay, all mottled with his blood, upon the table. ⁴⁰²Holmes tossed it in among the blazing papers. ⁴⁰³Then he drew the key from the outer door, passed

through after me, and locked it on the outside. ⁴⁰⁴“This way, Watson,” said he; “we can scale the garden wall in this direction.”

⁴⁰⁵I could not have believed that an alarm could have spread so swiftly. ⁴⁰⁶Looking back, the huge house was one blaze of light. ⁴⁰⁷The front door was open, and figures were rushing down the drive. ⁴⁰⁸The whole garden was alive with people, and one fellow raised a view-halloa as we emerged from the veranda and followed hard at our heels. ⁴⁰⁹Holmes seemed to know the ground perfectly, and he threaded his way swiftly among a plantation of small trees, I close at his heels, and our foremost pursuer panting behind us. ⁴¹⁰It was a six-foot wall which barred our path, but he sprang to the top and over. ⁴¹¹As I did the same I felt the hand of the man behind me grab at my ankle; but I kicked myself free and scrambled over a glass-strewn coping. ⁴¹²I fell upon my face among some bushes; but Holmes had me on my feet in an instant, and together we dashed away across the huge expanse of Hampstead Heath. ⁴¹³We had run two miles, I suppose, before Holmes at last halted and listened intently. ⁴¹⁴All was absolute silence behind us. ⁴¹⁵We had shaken off our pursuers and were safe.

⁴¹⁶We had breakfasted and were smoking our morning pipe on the day after the remarkable experience which I have recorded when Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, very solemn and impressive, was ushered into our modest sitting-room.

⁴¹⁷“Good morning, Mr. Holmes,” said he; “good morning. ⁴¹⁸May I ask if you are very busy just now?”

⁴¹⁹“Not too busy to listen to you.”

⁴²⁰“I thought that, perhaps, if you had nothing particular on hand, you might care to assist us in a most remarkable case which occurred only last night at Hampstead.”

⁴²¹“Dear me!” said Holmes. ⁴²²“What was that?”

⁴²³“A murder—a most dramatic and remarkable murder. ⁴²⁴I know how keen you are upon these things, and I would take it as a great favour if you would step down to Appledore Towers and give us the benefit of your advice. ⁴²⁵It is no ordinary crime. ⁴²⁶We have had our eyes upon this Mr. Milverton for some time, and, between ourselves, he was a bit of a villain. ⁴²⁷He is known to have held papers which he used for blackmailing purposes. ⁴²⁸These papers have all been burned by the murderers. ⁴²⁹No article of value was taken, as it is probable that the criminals were men of good position, whose sole object was to prevent social exposure.”

⁴³⁰“Criminals!” said Holmes. ⁴³¹“Plural!”

⁴³²“Yes, there were two of them. ⁴³³They were, as nearly as possible, captured red-handed. ⁴³⁴We have their foot-marks, we have their description; it's ten to one that we trace them. ⁴³⁵The first fellow was a bit too active, but the second was caught by the under-gardener and only got away after a struggle. ⁴³⁶He was a middle-sized, strongly-built man—square jaw, thick neck, moustache, a mask over his eyes.”

⁴³⁷“That's rather vague,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁴³⁸“Why, it might be a description of Watson!”

⁴³⁹“It's true,” said the inspector, with much amusement. ⁴⁴⁰“It might be a description of Watson.”

⁴⁴¹“Well, I am afraid I can't help you, Lestrade,” said Holmes. ⁴⁴²“The fact is that I knew this fellow Milverton, that I considered him one of the most dangerous men in London, and that I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge. ⁴⁴³No, it's no use arguing. ⁴⁴⁴I have made up my mind. ⁴⁴⁵My sympathies are with the criminals rather than with the victim, and I will not handle this case.”

⁴⁴⁶Holmes had not said one word to me about the tragedy which we had witnessed, but I observed all the morning that he was in his most thoughtful mood, and he gave me the impression, from his vacant eyes and his abstracted manner, of a man who is striving to recall something to his memory. ⁴⁴⁷We were

in the middle of our lunch when he suddenly sprang to his feet. ⁴⁴⁸“By Jove, Watson; I’ve got it!” he cried. ⁴⁴⁹“Take your hat! ⁴⁵⁰Come with me!” ⁴⁵¹He hurried at his top speed down Baker Street and along Oxford Street, until we had almost reached Regent Circus. ⁴⁵²Here on the left hand there stands a shop window filled with photographs of the celebrities and beauties of the day. ⁴⁵³Holmes’s eyes fixed themselves upon one of them, and following his gaze I saw the picture of a regal and stately lady in Court dress, with a high diamond tiara upon her noble head. ⁴⁵⁴I looked at that delicately-curved nose, at the marked eyebrows, at the straight mouth, and the strong little chin beneath it. ⁴⁵⁵Then I caught my breath as I read the time-honoured title of the great nobleman and statesman whose wife she had been. ⁴⁵⁶My eyes met those of Holmes, and he put his finger to his lips as we turned away from the window.

The Adventure of the Six Napoleons

¹It was no very unusual thing for Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, to look in upon us of an evening, and his visits were welcome to Sherlock Holmes, for they enabled him to keep in touch with all that was going on at the police head-quarters. ²In return for the news which Lestrade would bring, Holmes was always ready to listen with attention to the details of any case upon which the detective was engaged, and was able occasionally, without any active interference, to give some hint or suggestion drawn from his own vast knowledge and experience.

³On this particular evening Lestrade had spoken of the weather and the newspapers. ⁴Then he had fallen silent, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar. ⁵Holmes looked keenly at him.

⁶“Anything remarkable on hand?” he asked.

⁷“Oh, no, Mr. Holmes, nothing very particular.”

⁸“Then tell me about it.”

⁹Lestrade laughed.

¹⁰“Well, Mr. Holmes, there is no use denying that there is something on my mind. ¹¹And yet it is such an absurd business that I hesitated to bother you about it. ¹²On the other hand, although it is trivial, it is undoubtedly queer, and I know that you have a taste for all that is out of the common. ¹³But in my opinion it comes more in Dr. Watson's line than ours.”

¹⁴“Disease?” said I.

¹⁵“Madness, anyhow. ¹⁶And a queer madness too! ¹⁷You wouldn't think there was anyone living at this time of day who had such a hatred of Napoleon the First that he would break any image of him that he could see.”

¹⁸Holmes sank back in his chair.

¹⁹“That's no business of mine,” said he.

²⁰“Exactly. ²¹That's what I said. ²²But then, when the man commits burglary in order to break images which are not his own, that brings it away from the doctor and on to the policeman.”

²³Holmes sat up again.

²⁴“Burglary! ²⁵This is more interesting. ²⁶Let me hear the details.”

²⁷Lestrade took out his official note-book and refreshed his memory from its pages.

²⁸“The first case reported was four days ago,” said he. ²⁹“It was at the shop of Morse Hudson, who has a place for the sale of pictures and statues in the Kennington Road. ³⁰The assistant had left the front shop for an instant when he heard a crash, and hurrying in he found a plaster bust of Napoleon, which stood with several other works of art upon the counter, lying shivered into fragments. ³¹He rushed out into the road, but, although several passers-by declared that they had noticed a man run out of the shop, he could neither see anyone nor could he find any means of identifying the rascal. ³²It seemed to be one of those senseless acts of Hooliganism which occur from time to time, and it was reported to the constable on the beat as such. ³³The plaster cast was not worth more than a few shillings, and the whole affair appeared to be too childish for any particular investigation.

³⁴“The second case, however, was more serious and also more singular. ³⁵It occurred only last night.

³⁶“In Kennington Road, and within a few hundred yards of Morse Hudson's shop, there lives a well-known medical practitioner, named Dr. Barnicot, who has one of the largest practices upon the south side of the Thames. ³⁷His residence and principal consulting-room is at Kennington Road, but he has a branch surgery and dispensary at Lower Brixton Road, two miles away. ³⁸This Dr. Barnicot is an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon, and his house is full of books, pictures, and relics of the French Emperor. ³⁹Some little time ago he purchased from Morse Hudson two duplicate plaster casts of the famous head of Napoleon by the French sculptor, Devine. ⁴⁰One of these he placed in his hall in the house at Kennington Road, and the other on the mantelpiece of the surgery at Lower Brixton. ⁴¹Well, when Dr. Barnicot came down this morning he was astonished to find that his house had been burgled during the night, but that nothing had been taken save the plaster head from the hall. ⁴²It had been carried out and had been dashed savagely against the garden wall, under which its splintered fragments were discovered.”

⁴³Holmes rubbed his hands.

⁴⁴“This is certainly very novel,” said he.

⁴⁵“I thought it would please you. ⁴⁶But I have not got to the end yet. ⁴⁷Dr. Barnicot was due at his surgery at twelve o'clock, and you can imagine his amazement when, on arriving there, he found that the window had been opened in the night, and that the broken pieces of his second bust were strewn all over the room. ⁴⁸It had been smashed to atoms where it stood. ⁴⁹In neither case were there any signs which could give us a clue as to the criminal or lunatic who had done the mischief. ⁵⁰Now, Mr. Holmes, you have got the facts.”

⁵¹“They are singular, not to say grotesque,” said Holmes. ⁵²“May I ask whether the two busts smashed in Dr. Barnicot's rooms were the exact duplicates of the one which was destroyed in Morse Hudson's shop?”

⁵³“They were taken from the same mould.”

⁵⁴“Such a fact must tell against the theory that the man who breaks them is influenced by any general hatred of Napoleon. ⁵⁵Considering how many hundreds of statues of the great Emperor must exist in London, it is too much to suppose such a coincidence as that a promiscuous iconoclast should chance to begin upon three specimens of the same bust.”

⁵⁶“Well, I thought as you do,” said Lestrade. ⁵⁷“On the other hand, this Morse Hudson is the purveyor of busts in that part of London, and these three were the only ones which had been in his shop for years. ⁵⁸So, although, as you say, there are many hundreds of statues in London, it is very probable that these three were the only ones in that district. ⁵⁹Therefore, a local fanatic would begin with them. ⁶⁰What do you think, Dr. Watson?”

⁶¹“There are no limits to the possibilities of monomania,” I answered. ⁶²“There is the condition which the modern French psychologists have called the ‘*idée fixe*,’ which may be trifling in character, and accompanied by complete sanity in every other way. ⁶³A man who had read deeply about Napoleon, or who had possibly received some hereditary family injury through the great war, might conceivably form such an *idée fixe* and under its influence be capable of any fantastic outrage.”

⁶⁴“That won't do, my dear Watson,” said Holmes, shaking his head; “for no amount of *idée fixe* would enable your interesting monomaniac to find out where these busts were situated.”

⁶⁵“Well, how do you explain it?”

⁶⁶“I don't attempt to do so. ⁶⁷I would only observe that there is a certain method in the gentleman's eccentric proceedings. ⁶⁸For example, in Dr. Barnicot's hall, where a sound might arouse the family, the bust was taken outside before being broken, whereas in the surgery, where there was less danger of an

alarm, it was smashed where it stood. ⁶⁹The affair seems absurdly trifling, and yet I dare call nothing trivial when I reflect that some of my most classic cases have had the least promising commencement. ⁷⁰You will remember, Watson, how the dreadful business of the Abernethy family was first brought to my notice by the depth which the parsley had sunk into the butter upon a hot day. ⁷¹I can't afford, therefore, to smile at your three broken busts, Lestrade, and I shall be very much obliged to you if you will let me hear of any fresh developments of so singular a chain of events."

⁷²The development for which my friend had asked came in a quicker and an infinitely more tragic form than he could have imagined. ⁷³I was still dressing in my bedroom next morning when there was a tap at the door and Holmes entered, a telegram in his hand. ⁷⁴He read it aloud:

⁷⁵"Come instantly, 131, Pitt Street, Kensington.

⁷⁶— "Lestrade."

⁷⁷"What is it, then?" I asked.

⁷⁸"Don't know—may be anything. ⁷⁹But I suspect it is the sequel of the story of the statues. ⁸⁰In that case our friend, the image-breaker, has begun operations in another quarter of London. ⁸¹There's coffee on the table, Watson, and I have a cab at the door."

⁸²In half an hour we had reached Pitt Street, a quiet little backwater just beside one of the briskest currents of London life. ⁸³No. 131 was one of a row, all flat-chested, respectable, and most unromantic dwellings. ⁸⁴As we drove up we found the railings in front of the house lined by a curious crowd. ⁸⁵Holmes whistled.

⁸⁶"By George! it's attempted murder at the least. ⁸⁷Nothing less will hold the London message-boy. ⁸⁸There's a deed of violence indicated in that fellow's round shoulders and outstretched neck. ⁸⁹What's this, Watson? ⁹⁰The top steps swilled down and the other ones dry. ⁹¹Footsteps enough, anyhow! ⁹²Well, well, there's Lestrade at the front window, and we shall soon know all about it."

⁹³The official received us with a very grave face and showed us into a sitting-room, where an exceedingly unkempt and agitated elderly man, clad in a flannel dressing-gown, was pacing up and down. ⁹⁴He was introduced to us as the owner of the house—Mr. Horace Harker, of the Central Press Syndicate.

⁹⁵"It's the Napoleon bust business again," said Lestrade. ⁹⁶"You seemed interested last night, Mr. Holmes, so I thought perhaps you would be glad to be present now that the affair has taken a very much graver turn."

⁹⁷"What has it turned to, then?"

⁹⁸"To murder. ⁹⁹Mr. Harker, will you tell these gentlemen exactly what has occurred?"

¹⁰⁰The man in the dressing-gown turned upon us with a most melancholy face.

¹⁰¹"It's an extraordinary thing," said he, "that all my life I have been collecting other people's news, and now that a real piece of news has come my own way I am so confused and bothered that I can't put two words together. ¹⁰²If I had come in here as a journalist I should have interviewed myself and had two columns in every evening paper. ¹⁰³As it is I am giving away valuable copy by telling my story over and over to a string of different people, and I can make no use of it myself. ¹⁰⁴However, I've heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and if you'll only explain this queer business I shall be paid for my trouble in telling you the story."

¹⁰⁵Holmes sat down and listened.

¹⁰⁶“It all seems to centre round that bust of Napoleon which I bought for this very room about four months ago. ¹⁰⁷I picked it up cheap from Harding Brothers, two doors from the High Street Station. ¹⁰⁸A great deal of my journalistic work is done at night, and I often write until the early morning. ¹⁰⁹So it was to-day. ¹¹⁰I was sitting in my den, which is at the back of the top of the house, about three o'clock, when I was convinced that I heard some sounds downstairs. ¹¹¹I listened, but they were not repeated, and I concluded that they came from outside. ¹¹²Then suddenly, about five minutes later, there came a most horrible yell—the most dreadful sound, Mr. Holmes, that ever I heard. ¹¹³It will ring in my ears as long as I live. ¹¹⁴I sat frozen with horror for a minute or two. ¹¹⁵Then I seized the poker and went downstairs. ¹¹⁶When I entered this room I found the window wide open, and I at once observed that the bust was gone from the mantelpiece. ¹¹⁷Why any burglar should take such a thing passes my understanding, for it was only a plaster cast and of no real value whatever.

¹¹⁸“You can see for yourself that anyone going out through that open window could reach the front doorstep by taking a long stride. ¹¹⁹This was clearly what the burglar had done, so I went round and opened the door. ¹²⁰Stepping out into the dark I nearly fell over a dead man who was lying there. ¹²¹I ran back for a light, and there was the poor fellow, a great gash in his throat and the whole place swimming in blood. ¹²²He lay on his back, his knees drawn up, and his mouth horribly open. ¹²³I shall see him in my dreams. ¹²⁴I had just time to blow on my police-whistle, and then I must have fainted, for I knew nothing more until I found the policeman standing over me in the hall.”

¹²⁵“Well, who was the murdered man?” asked Holmes.

¹²⁶“There's nothing to show who he was,” said Lestrade. ¹²⁷“You shall see the body at the mortuary, but we have made nothing of it up to now. ¹²⁸He is a tall man, sunburned, very powerful, not more than thirty. ¹²⁹He is poorly dressed, and yet does not appear to be a labourer. ¹³⁰A horn-handled clasp knife was lying in a pool of blood beside him. ¹³¹Whether it was the weapon which did the deed, or whether it belonged to the dead man, I do not know. ¹³²There was no name on his clothing, and nothing in his pockets save an apple, some string, a shilling map of London, and a photograph. ¹³³Here it is.”

¹³⁴It was evidently taken by a snap-shot from a small camera. ¹³⁵It represented an alert, sharp-featured simian man with thick eyebrows, and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face like the muzzle of a baboon.

¹³⁶“And what became of the bust?” asked Holmes, after a careful study of this picture.

¹³⁷“We had news of it just before you came. ¹³⁸It has been found in the front garden of an empty house in Campden House Road. ¹³⁹It was broken into fragments. ¹⁴⁰I am going round now to see it. ¹⁴¹Will you come?”

¹⁴²“Certainly. ¹⁴³I must just take one look round.” ¹⁴⁴He examined the carpet and the window. ¹⁴⁵“The fellow had either very long legs or was a most active man,” said he. ¹⁴⁶“With an area beneath, it was no mean feat to reach that window-ledge and open that window. ¹⁴⁷Getting back was comparatively simple. ¹⁴⁸Are you coming with us to see the remains of your bust, Mr. Harker?”

¹⁴⁹The disconsolate journalist had seated himself at a writing-table.

¹⁵⁰“I must try and make something of it,” said he, “though I have no doubt that the first editions of the evening papers are out already with full details. ¹⁵¹It's like my luck! ¹⁵²You remember when the stand fell at Doncaster? ¹⁵³Well, I was the only journalist in the stand, and my journal the only one that had no account of it, for I was too shaken to write it. ¹⁵⁴And now I'll be too late with a murder done on my own doorstep.”

¹⁵⁵As we left the room we heard his pen travelling shrilly over the foolscap.

¹⁵⁶The spot where the fragments of the bust had been found was only a few hundred yards away. ¹⁵⁷For the first time our eyes rested upon this presentment of the great Emperor, which seemed to raise such frantic and destructive hatred in the mind of the unknown. ¹⁵⁸It lay scattered in splintered shards upon the grass. ¹⁵⁹Holmes picked up several of them and examined them carefully. ¹⁶⁰I was convinced from his intent face and his purposeful manner that at last he was upon a clue.

¹⁶¹"Well?" asked Lestrade.

¹⁶²Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

¹⁶³"We have a long way to go yet," said he. ¹⁶⁴"And yet—and yet—well, we have some suggestive facts to act upon. ¹⁶⁵The possession of this trifling bust was worth more in the eyes of this strange criminal than a human life. ¹⁶⁶That is one point. ¹⁶⁷Then there is the singular fact that he did not break it in the house, or immediately outside the house, if to break it was his sole object."

¹⁶⁸"He was rattled and bustled by meeting this other fellow. ¹⁶⁹He hardly knew what he was doing."

¹⁷⁰"Well, that's likely enough. ¹⁷¹But I wish to call your attention very particularly to the position of this house in the garden of which the bust was destroyed."

¹⁷²Lestrade looked about him.

¹⁷³"It was an empty house, and so he knew that he would not be disturbed in the garden."

¹⁷⁴"Yes, but there is another empty house farther up the street which he must have passed before he came to this one. ¹⁷⁵Why did he not break it there, since it is evident that every yard that he carried it increased the risk of someone meeting him?"

¹⁷⁶"I give it up," said Lestrade.

¹⁷⁷Holmes pointed to the street lamp above our heads.

¹⁷⁸"He could see what he was doing here and he could not there. ¹⁷⁹That was his reason."

¹⁸⁰"By Jove! that's true," said the detective. ¹⁸¹"Now that I come to think of it, Dr. Barnicot's bust was broken not far from his red lamp. ¹⁸²Well, Mr. Holmes, what are we to do with that fact?"

¹⁸³"To remember it—to docket it. ¹⁸⁴We may come on something later which will bear upon it. ¹⁸⁵What steps do you propose to take now, Lestrade?"

¹⁸⁶"The most practical way of getting at it, in my opinion, is to identify the dead man. ¹⁸⁷There should be no difficulty about that. ¹⁸⁸When we have found who he is and who his associates are, we should have a good start in learning what he was doing in Pitt Street last night, and who it was who met him and killed him on the doorstep of Mr. Horace Harker. ¹⁸⁹Don't you think so?"

¹⁹⁰"No doubt; and yet it is not quite the way in which I should approach the case."

¹⁹¹"What would you do, then?"

¹⁹²"Oh, you must not let me influence you in any way! ¹⁹³I suggest that you go on your line and I on mine. ¹⁹⁴We can compare notes afterwards, and each will supplement the other."

¹⁹⁵"Very good," said Lestrade.

¹⁹⁶"If you are going back to Pitt Street you might see Mr. Horace Harker. ¹⁹⁷Tell him from me that I have quite made up my mind, and that it is certain that a dangerous homicidal lunatic with Napoleonic delusions was in his house last night. ¹⁹⁸It will be useful for his article."

¹⁹⁹Lestrade stared.

²⁰⁰“You don't seriously believe that?”

²⁰¹Holmes smiled.

²⁰²“Don't I? ²⁰³Well, perhaps I don't. ²⁰⁴But I am sure that it will interest Mr. Horace Harker and the subscribers of the Central Press Syndicate. ²⁰⁵Now, Watson, I think that we shall find that we have a long and rather complex day's work before us. ²⁰⁶I should be glad, Lestrade, if you could make it convenient to meet us at Baker Street at six o'clock this evening. ²⁰⁷Until then I should like to keep this photograph found in the dead man's pocket. ²⁰⁸It is possible that I may have to ask your company and assistance upon a small expedition which will have to be undertaken to-night, if my chain of reasoning should prove to be correct. ²⁰⁹Until then, good-bye and good luck!”

²¹⁰Sherlock Holmes and I walked together to the High Street, where he stopped at the shop of Harding Brothers, whence the bust had been purchased. ²¹¹A young assistant informed us that Mr. Harding would be absent until after noon, and that he was himself a newcomer who could give us no information. ²¹²Holmes's face showed his disappointment and annoyance.

²¹³“Well, well, we can't expect to have it all our own way, Watson,” he said, at last. ²¹⁴“We must come back in the afternoon if Mr. Harding will not be here until then. ²¹⁵I am, as you have no doubt surmised, endeavouring to trace these busts to their source, in order to find if there is not something peculiar which may account for their remarkable fate. ²¹⁶Let us make for Mr. Morse Hudson, of the Kennington Road, and see if he can throw any light upon the problem.”

²¹⁷A drive of an hour brought us to the picture-dealer's establishment. ²¹⁸He was a small, stout man with a red face and a peppery manner.

²¹⁹“Yes, sir. ²²⁰On my very counter, sir,” said he. ²²¹“What we pay rates and taxes for I don't know, when any ruffian can come in and break one's goods. ²²²Yes, sir, it was I who sold Dr. Barnicot his two statues. ²²³Disgraceful, sir! ²²⁴A Nihilist plot, that's what I make it. ²²⁵No one but an Anarchist would go about breaking statues. ²²⁶Red republicans, that's what I call 'em. ²²⁷Who did I get the statues from? ²²⁸I don't see what that has to do with it. ²²⁹Well, if you really want to know, I got them from Gelder & Co., in Church Street, Stepney. ²³⁰They are a well-known house in the trade, and have been this twenty years. ²³¹How many had I? ²³²Three—two and one are three—two of Dr. Barnicot's and one smashed in broad daylight on my own counter. ²³³Do I know that photograph? ²³⁴No, I don't. ²³⁵Yes, I do, though. ²³⁶Why, it's Beppo. ²³⁷He was a kind of Italian piece-work man, who made himself useful in the shop. ²³⁸He could carve a bit and gild and frame, and do odd jobs. ²³⁹The fellow left me last week, and I've heard nothing of him since. ²⁴⁰No, I don't know where he came from nor where he went to. ²⁴¹I have nothing against him while he was here. ²⁴²He was gone two days before the bust was smashed.”

²⁴³“Well, that's all we could reasonably expect to get from Morse Hudson,” said Holmes, as we emerged from the shop. ²⁴⁴“We have this Beppo as a common factor, both in Kennington and in Kensington, so that is worth a ten-mile drive. ²⁴⁵Now, Watson, let us make for Gelder & Co., of Stepney, the source and origin of busts. ²⁴⁶I shall be surprised if we don't get some help down there.”

²⁴⁷In rapid succession we passed through the fringe of fashionable London, hotel London, theatrical London, literary London, commercial London, and, finally, maritime London, till we came to a riverside city of a hundred thousand souls, where the tenement houses swelter and reek with the outcasts of Europe. ²⁴⁸Here, in a broad thoroughfare, once the abode of wealthy City merchants, we found the sculpture works for which we searched. ²⁴⁹Outside was a considerable yard full of monumental masonry. ²⁵⁰Inside was a large room in which fifty workers were carving or moulding. ²⁵¹The manager, a big blond German, received us civilly, and gave a clear answer to all Holmes's questions. ²⁵²A reference to his books showed that hundreds of casts had been taken from a marble copy of Devine's head of Napoleon, but that the three which had been sent to Morse Hudson a year or so before had been half of a batch of six, the other three being sent to Harding Brothers, of Kensington. ²⁵³There was no

reason why those six should be different to any of the other casts. ²⁵⁴He could suggest no possible cause why anyone should wish to destroy them—in fact, he laughed at the idea. ²⁵⁵Their wholesale price was six shillings, but the retailer would get twelve or more. ²⁵⁶The cast was taken in two moulds from each side of the face, and then these two profiles of plaster of Paris were joined together to make the complete bust. ²⁵⁷The work was usually done by Italians in the room we were in. ²⁵⁸When finished the busts were put on a table in the passage to dry, and afterwards stored. ²⁵⁹That was all he could tell us.

²⁶⁰But the production of the photograph had a remarkable effect upon the manager. ²⁶¹His face flushed with anger, and his brows knotted over his blue Teutonic eyes.

²⁶²“Ah, the rascal!” he cried. ²⁶³“Yes, indeed, I know him very well. ²⁶⁴This has always been a respectable establishment, and the only time that we have ever had the police in it was over this very fellow. ²⁶⁵It was more than a year ago now. ²⁶⁶He knifed another Italian in the street, and then he came to the works with the police on his heels, and he was taken here. ²⁶⁷Beppo was his name—his second name I never knew. ²⁶⁸Serve me right for engaging a man with such a face. ²⁶⁹But he was a good workman, one of the best.”

²⁷⁰“What did he get?”

²⁷¹“The man lived and he got off with a year. ²⁷²I have no doubt he is out now; but he has not dared to show his nose here. ²⁷³We have a cousin of his here, and I dare say he could tell you where he is.”

²⁷⁴“No, no,” cried Holmes, “not a word to the cousin—not a word, I beg you. ²⁷⁵The matter is very important, and the farther I go with it the more important it seems to grow. ²⁷⁶When you referred in your ledger to the sale of those casts I observed that the date was June 3rd of last year. ²⁷⁷Could you give me the date when Beppo was arrested?”

²⁷⁸“I could tell you roughly by the pay-list,” the manager answered. ²⁷⁹“Yes,” he continued, after some turning over of pages, “he was paid last on May 20th.”

²⁸⁰“Thank you,” said Holmes. ²⁸¹“I don't think that I need intrude upon your time and patience any more.” ²⁸²With a last word of caution that he should say nothing as to our researches we turned our faces westward once more.

²⁸³The afternoon was far advanced before we were able to snatch a hasty luncheon at a restaurant. ²⁸⁴A news-bill at the entrance announced “Kensington Outrage. Murder by a Madman,” and the contents of the paper showed that Mr. Horace Harker had got his account into print after all. ²⁸⁵Two columns were occupied with a highly sensational and flowery rendering of the whole incident. ²⁸⁶Holmes propped it against the cruet-stand and read it while he ate. ²⁸⁷Once or twice he chuckled.

²⁸⁸“This is all right, Watson,” said he. ²⁸⁹“Listen to this:

²⁹⁰“It is satisfactory to know that there can be no difference of opinion upon this case, since Mr. Lestrade, one of the most experienced members of the official force, and Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well-known consulting expert, have each come to the conclusion that the grotesque series of incidents, which have ended in so tragic a fashion, arise from lunacy rather than from deliberate crime. ²⁹¹No explanation save mental aberration can cover the facts.

²⁹²“The Press, Watson, is a most valuable institution if you only know how to use it. ²⁹³And now, if you have quite finished, we will hark back to Kensington and see what the manager of Harding Brothers has to say to the matter.”

²⁹⁴The founder of that great emporium proved to be a brisk, crisp little person, very dapper and quick, with a clear head and a ready tongue.

²⁹⁵“Yes, sir, I have already read the account in the evening papers. ²⁹⁶Mr. Horace Harker is a customer of ours. ²⁹⁷We supplied him with the bust some months ago. ²⁹⁸We ordered three busts of that sort from Gelder & Co., of Stepney. ²⁹⁹They are all sold now. ³⁰⁰To whom? ³⁰¹Oh, I dare say by consulting our sales book we could very easily tell you. ³⁰²Yes, we have the entries here. ³⁰³One to Mr. Harker, you see, and one to Mr. Josiah Brown, of Laburnum Lodge, Laburnum Vale, Chiswick, and one to Mr. Sandeford, of Lower Grove Road, Reading. ³⁰⁴No, I have never seen this face which you show me in the photograph. ³⁰⁵You would hardly forget it, would you, sir, for I've seldom seen an uglier. ³⁰⁶Have we any Italians on the staff? ³⁰⁷Yes, sir, we have several among our workpeople and cleaners. ³⁰⁸I dare say they might get a peep at that sales book if they wanted to. ³⁰⁹There is no particular reason for keeping a watch upon that book. ³¹⁰Well, well, it's a very strange business, and I hope that you'll let me know if anything comes of your inquiries.”

³¹¹Holmes had taken several notes during Mr. Harding's evidence, and I could see that he was thoroughly satisfied by the turn which affairs were taking. ³¹²He made no remark, however, save that, unless we hurried, we should be late for our appointment with Lestrade. ³¹³Sure enough, when we reached Baker Street the detective was already there, and we found him pacing up and down in a fever of impatience. ³¹⁴His look of importance showed that his day's work had not been in vain.

³¹⁵“Well?” he asked. ³¹⁶“What luck, Mr. Holmes?”

³¹⁷“We have had a very busy day, and not entirely a wasted one,” my friend explained. ³¹⁸“We have seen both the retailers and also the wholesale manufacturers. ³¹⁹I can trace each of the busts now from the beginning.”

³²⁰“The busts!” cried Lestrade. ³²¹“Well, well, you have your own methods, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and it is not for me to say a word against them, but I think I have done a better day's work than you. ³²²I have identified the dead man.”

³²³“You don't say so?”

³²⁴“And found a cause for the crime.”

³²⁵“Splendid!”

³²⁶“We have an inspector who makes a specialty of Saffron Hill and the Italian quarter. ³²⁷Well, this dead man had some Catholic emblem round his neck, and that, along with his colour, made me think he was from the South. ³²⁸Inspector Hill knew him the moment he caught sight of him. ³²⁹His name is Pietro Venucci, from Naples, and he is one of the greatest cut-throats in London. ³³⁰He is connected with the Mafia, which, as you know, is a secret political society, enforcing its decrees by murder. ³³¹Now you see how the affair begins to clear up. ³³²The other fellow is probably an Italian also, and a member of the Mafia. ³³³He has broken the rules in some fashion. ³³⁴Pietro is set upon his track. ³³⁵Probably the photograph we found in his pocket is the man himself, so that he may not knife the wrong person. ³³⁶He dogs the fellow, he sees him enter a house, he waits outside for him, and in the scuffle he receives his own death-wound. ³³⁷How is that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

³³⁸Holmes clapped his hands approvingly.

³³⁹“Excellent, Lestrade, excellent!” he cried. ³⁴⁰“But I didn't quite follow your explanation of the destruction of the busts.”

³⁴¹“The busts! ³⁴²You never can get those busts out of your head. ³⁴³After all, that is nothing; petty larceny, six months at the most. ³⁴⁴It is the murder that we are really investigating, and I tell you that I am gathering all the threads into my hands.”

³⁴⁵“And the next stage?”

³⁴⁶“Is a very simple one. ³⁴⁷I shall go down with Hill to the Italian quarter, find the man whose photograph we have got, and arrest him on the charge of murder. ³⁴⁸Will you come with us?”

³⁴⁹“I think not. ³⁵⁰I fancy we can attain our end in a simpler way. ³⁵¹I can't say for certain, because it all depends—well, it all depends upon a factor which is completely outside our control. ³⁵²But I have great hopes—in fact, the betting is exactly two to one—that if you will come with us to-night I shall be able to help you to lay him by the heels.”

³⁵³“In the Italian quarter?”

³⁵⁴“No; I fancy Chiswick is an address which is more likely to find him. ³⁵⁵If you will come with me to Chiswick to-night, Lestrade, I'll promise to go to the Italian quarter with you to-morrow, and no harm will be done by the delay. ³⁵⁶And now I think that a few hours' sleep would do us all good, for I do not propose to leave before eleven o'clock, and it is unlikely that we shall be back before morning. ³⁵⁷You'll dine with us, Lestrade, and then you are welcome to the sofa until it is time for us to start. ³⁵⁸In the meantime, Watson, I should be glad if you would ring for an express messenger, for I have a letter to send, and it is important that it should go at once.”

³⁵⁹Holmes spent the evening in rummaging among the files of the old daily papers with which one of our lumber-rooms was packed. ³⁶⁰When at last he descended it was with triumph in his eyes, but he said nothing to either of us as to the result of his researches. ³⁶¹For my own part, I had followed step by step the methods by which he had traced the various windings of this complex case, and, though I could not yet perceive the goal which we would reach, I understood clearly that Holmes expected this grotesque criminal to make an attempt upon the two remaining busts, one of which, I remembered, was at Chiswick. ³⁶²No doubt the object of our journey was to catch him in the very act, and I could not but admire the cunning with which my friend had inserted a wrong clue in the evening paper, so as to give the fellow the idea that he could continue his scheme with impunity. ³⁶³I was not surprised when Holmes suggested that I should take my revolver with me. ³⁶⁴He had himself picked up the loaded hunting-crop which was his favourite weapon.

³⁶⁵A four-wheeler was at the door at eleven, and in it we drove to a spot at the other side of Hammersmith Bridge. ³⁶⁶Here the cabman was directed to wait. ³⁶⁷A short walk brought us to a secluded road fringed with pleasant houses, each standing in its own grounds. ³⁶⁸In the light of a street lamp we read “Laburnum Villa” upon the gate-post of one of them. ³⁶⁹The occupants had evidently retired to rest, for all was dark save for a fanlight over the hall door, which shed a single blurred circle on to the garden path. ³⁷⁰The wooden fence which separated the grounds from the road threw a dense black shadow upon the inner side, and here it was that we crouched.

³⁷¹“I fear that you'll have a long wait,” Holmes whispered. ³⁷²“We may thank our stars that it is not raining. ³⁷³I don't think we can even venture to smoke to pass the time. ³⁷⁴However, it's a two to one chance that we get something to pay us for our trouble.”

³⁷⁵It proved, however, that our vigil was not to be so long as Holmes had led us to fear, and it ended in a very sudden and singular fashion. ³⁷⁶In an instant, without the least sound to warn us of his coming, the garden gate swung open, and a lithe, dark figure, as swift and active as an ape, rushed up the garden path. ³⁷⁷We saw it whisk past the light thrown from over the door and disappear against the black shadow of the house. ³⁷⁸There was a long pause, during which we held our breath, and then a very gentle creaking sound came to our ears. ³⁷⁹The window was being opened. ³⁸⁰The noise ceased, and again there was a long silence. ³⁸¹The fellow was making his way into the house. ³⁸²We saw the sudden flash of a dark lantern inside the room. ³⁸³What he sought was evidently not there, for again we saw the flash through another blind, and then through another.

³⁸⁴“Let us get to the open window. ³⁸⁵We will nab him as he climbs out,” Lestrade whispered.

³⁸⁶But before we could move the man had emerged again. ³⁸⁷As he came out into the glimmering patch of light we saw that he carried something white under his arm. ³⁸⁸He looked stealthily all round him. ³⁸⁹The silence of the deserted street reassured him. ³⁹⁰Turning his back upon us he laid down his burden, and the next instant there was the sound of a sharp tap, followed by a clatter and rattle. ³⁹¹The man was so intent upon what he was doing that he never heard our steps as we stole across the grass plot. ³⁹²With the bound of a tiger Holmes was on his back, and an instant later Lestrade and I had him by either wrist and the handcuffs had been fastened. ³⁹³As we turned him over I saw a hideous, sallow face, with writhing, furious features, glaring up at us, and I knew that it was indeed the man of the photograph whom we had secured.

³⁹⁴But it was not our prisoner to whom Holmes was giving his attention. ³⁹⁵Squatted on the doorstep, he was engaged in most carefully examining that which the man had brought from the house. ³⁹⁶It was a bust of Napoleon like the one which we had seen that morning, and it had been broken into similar fragments. ³⁹⁷Carefully Holmes held each separate shard to the light, but in no way did it differ from any other shattered piece of plaster. ³⁹⁸He had just completed his examination when the hall lights flew up, the door opened, and the owner of the house, a jovial, rotund figure in shirt and trousers, presented himself.

³⁹⁹“Mr. Josiah Brown, I suppose?” said Holmes.

⁴⁰⁰“Yes, sir; and you, no doubt, are Mr. Sherlock Holmes?” ⁴⁰¹I had the note which you sent by the express messenger, and I did exactly what you told me. ⁴⁰²We locked every door on the inside and awaited developments. ⁴⁰³Well, I’m very glad to see that you have got the rascal. ⁴⁰⁴I hope, gentlemen, that you will come in and have some refreshment.”

⁴⁰⁵However, Lestrade was anxious to get his man into safe quarters, so within a few minutes our cab had been summoned and we were all four upon our way to London. ⁴⁰⁶Not a word would our captive say; but he glared at us from the shadow of his matted hair, and once, when my hand seemed within his reach, he snapped at it like a hungry wolf. ⁴⁰⁷We stayed long enough at the police-station to learn that a search of his clothing revealed nothing save a few shillings and a long sheath knife, the handle of which bore copious traces of recent blood.

⁴⁰⁸“That’s all right,” said Lestrade, as we parted. ⁴⁰⁹“Hill knows all these gentry, and he will give a name to him. ⁴¹⁰You’ll find that my theory of the Mafia will work out all right. ⁴¹¹But I’m sure I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Holmes, for the workmanlike way in which you laid hands upon him. ⁴¹²I don’t quite understand it all yet.”

⁴¹³“I fear it is rather too late an hour for explanations,” said Holmes. ⁴¹⁴“Besides, there are one or two details which are not finished off, and it is one of those cases which are worth working out to the very end. ⁴¹⁵If you will come round once more to my rooms at six o’clock to-morrow I think I shall be able to show you that even now you have not grasped the entire meaning of this business, which presents some features which make it absolutely original in the history of crime. ⁴¹⁶If ever I permit you to chronicle any more of my little problems, Watson, I foresee that you will enliven your pages by an account of the singular adventure of the Napoleonic busts.”

⁴¹⁷When we met again next evening Lestrade was furnished with much information concerning our prisoner. ⁴¹⁸His name, it appeared, was Beppo, second name unknown. ⁴¹⁹He was a well-known ne’er-do-well among the Italian colony. ⁴²⁰He had once been a skilful sculptor and had earned an honest living, but he had taken to evil courses and had twice already been in jail—once for a petty theft and once, as we had already heard, for stabbing a fellow-countryman. ⁴²¹He could talk English perfectly well. ⁴²²His reasons for destroying the busts were still unknown, and he refused to answer any questions upon the subject; but the police had discovered that these same busts might very well have been made by his own hands, since he was engaged in this class of work at the establishment of Gelder & Co. ⁴²³To all this information, much of which we already knew, Holmes listened with polite attention; but I, who

knew him so well, could clearly see that his thoughts were elsewhere, and I detected a mixture of mingled uneasiness and expectation beneath that mask which he was wont to assume. ⁴²⁴At last he started in his chair and his eyes brightened. ⁴²⁵There had been a ring at the bell. ⁴²⁶A minute later we heard steps upon the stairs, and an elderly, red-faced man with grizzled side-whiskers was ushered in. ⁴²⁷In his right hand he carried an old-fashioned carpet-bag, which he placed upon the table.

⁴²⁸“Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?”

⁴²⁹My friend bowed and smiled. ⁴³⁰“Mr. Sandeford, of Reading, I suppose?” said he.

⁴³¹“Yes, sir, I fear that I am a little late; but the trains were awkward. ⁴³²You wrote to me about a bust that is in my possession.”

⁴³³“Exactly.”

⁴³⁴“I have your letter here. ⁴³⁵You said, ‘I desire to possess a copy of Devine's Napoleon, and am prepared to pay you ten pounds for the one which is in your possession.’ ⁴³⁶Is that right?”

⁴³⁷“Certainly.”

⁴³⁸“I was very much surprised at your letter, for I could not imagine how you knew that I owned such a thing.”

⁴³⁹“Of course you must have been surprised, but the explanation is very simple. ⁴⁴⁰Mr. Harding, of Harding Brothers, said that they had sold you their last copy, and he gave me your address.”

⁴⁴¹“Oh, that was it, was it? ⁴⁴²Did he tell you what I paid for it?”

⁴⁴³“No, he did not.”

⁴⁴⁴“Well, I am an honest man, though not a very rich one. ⁴⁴⁵I only gave fifteen shillings for the bust, and I think you ought to know that before I take ten pounds from you.”

⁴⁴⁶“I am sure the scruple does you honour, Mr. Sandeford. ⁴⁴⁷But I have named that price, so I intend to stick to it.”

⁴⁴⁸“Well, it is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁴⁹I brought the bust up with me, as you asked me to do. ⁴⁵⁰Here it is!” ⁴⁵¹He opened his bag, and at last we saw placed upon our table a complete specimen of that bust which we had already seen more than once in fragments.

⁴⁵²Holmes took a paper from his pocket and laid a ten-pound note upon the table.

⁴⁵³“You will kindly sign that paper, Mr. Sandeford, in the presence of these witnesses. ⁴⁵⁴It is simply to say that you transfer every possible right that you ever had in the bust to me. ⁴⁵⁵I am a methodical man, you see, and you never know what turn events might take afterwards. ⁴⁵⁶Thank you, Mr. Sandeford; here is your money, and I wish you a very good evening.”

⁴⁵⁷When our visitor had disappeared Sherlock Holmes's movements were such as to rivet our attention. ⁴⁵⁸He began by taking a clean white cloth from a drawer and laying it over the table. ⁴⁵⁹Then he placed his newly-acquired bust in the centre of the cloth. ⁴⁶⁰Finally, he picked up his hunting-crop and struck Napoleon a sharp blow on the top of the head. ⁴⁶¹The figure broke into fragments, and Holmes bent eagerly over the shattered remains. ⁴⁶²Next instant, with a loud shout of triumph, he held up one splinter, in which a round, dark object was fixed like a plum in a pudding.

⁴⁶³“Gentlemen,” he cried, “let me introduce you to the famous black pearl of the Borgias.”

⁴⁶⁴Lestrade and I sat silent for a moment, and then, with a spontaneous impulse, we both broke out clapping as at the well-wrought crisis of a play. ⁴⁶⁵A flush of colour sprang to Holmes's pale cheeks,

and he bowed to us like the master dramatist who receives the homage of his audience. ⁴⁶⁶It was at such moments that for an instant he ceased to be a reasoning machine, and betrayed his human love for admiration and applause. ⁴⁶⁷The same singularly proud and reserved nature which turned away with disdain from popular notoriety was capable of being moved to its depths by spontaneous wonder and praise from a friend.

⁴⁶⁸“Yes, gentlemen,” said he, “it is the most famous pearl now existing in the world, and it has been my good fortune, by a connected chain of inductive reasoning, to trace it from the Prince of Colonna's bedroom at the Dacre Hotel, where it was lost, to the interior of this, the last of the six busts of Napoleon which were manufactured by Gelder & Co., of Stepney. ⁴⁶⁹You will remember, Lestrade, the sensation caused by the disappearance of this valuable jewel, and the vain efforts of the London police to recover it. ⁴⁷⁰I was myself consulted upon the case; but I was unable to throw any light upon it. ⁴⁷¹Suspicion fell upon the maid of the Princess, who was an Italian, and it was proved that she had a brother in London, but we failed to trace any connection between them. ⁴⁷²The maid's name was Lucretia Venucci, and there is no doubt in my mind that this Pietro who was murdered two nights ago was the brother. ⁴⁷³I have been looking up the dates in the old files of the paper, and I find that the disappearance of the pearl was exactly two days before the arrest of Beppo for some crime of violence, an event which took place in the factory of Gelder & Co., at the very moment when these busts were being made. ⁴⁷⁴Now you clearly see the sequence of events, though you see them, of course, in the inverse order to the way in which they presented themselves to me. ⁴⁷⁵Beppo had the pearl in his possession. ⁴⁷⁶He may have stolen it from Pietro, he may have been Pietro's confederate, he may have been the go-between of Pietro and his sister. ⁴⁷⁷It is of no consequence to us which is the correct solution.

⁴⁷⁸“The main fact is that he had the pearl, and at that moment, when it was on his person, he was pursued by the police. ⁴⁷⁹He made for the factory in which he worked, and he knew that he had only a few minutes in which to conceal this enormously valuable prize, which would otherwise be found on him when he was searched. ⁴⁸⁰Six plaster casts of Napoleon were drying in the passage. ⁴⁸¹One of them was still soft. ⁴⁸²In an instant Beppo, a skilful workman, made a small hole in the wet plaster, dropped in the pearl, and with a few touches covered over the aperture once more. ⁴⁸³It was an admirable hiding-place. ⁴⁸⁴No one could possibly find it. ⁴⁸⁵But Beppo was condemned to a year's imprisonment, and in the meanwhile his six busts were scattered over London. ⁴⁸⁶He could not tell which contained his treasure. ⁴⁸⁷Only by breaking them could he see. ⁴⁸⁸Even shaking would tell him nothing, for as the plaster was wet it was probable that the pearl would adhere to it—as, in fact, it has done. ⁴⁸⁹Beppo did not despair, and he conducted his search with considerable ingenuity and perseverance. ⁴⁹⁰Through a cousin who works with Gelder he found out the retail firms who had bought the busts. ⁴⁹¹He managed to find employment with Morse Hudson, and in that way tracked down three of them. ⁴⁹²The pearl was not there. ⁴⁹³Then, with the help of some Italian employe, he succeeded in finding out where the other three busts had gone. ⁴⁹⁴The first was at Harker's. ⁴⁹⁵There he was dogged by his confederate, who held Beppo responsible for the loss of the pearl, and he stabbed him in the scuffle which followed.”

⁴⁹⁶“If he was his confederate why should he carry his photograph?” I asked.

⁴⁹⁷“As a means of tracing him if he wished to inquire about him from any third person. ⁴⁹⁸That was the obvious reason. ⁴⁹⁹Well, after the murder I calculated that Beppo would probably hurry rather than delay his movements. ⁵⁰⁰He would fear that the police would read his secret, and so he hastened on before they should get ahead of him. ⁵⁰¹Of course, I could not say that he had not found the pearl in Harker's bust. ⁵⁰²I had not even concluded for certain that it was the pearl; but it was evident to me that he was looking for something, since he carried the bust past the other houses in order to break it in the garden which had a lamp overlooking it. ⁵⁰³Since Harker's bust was one in three the chances were exactly as I told you, two to one against the pearl being inside it. ⁵⁰⁴There remained two busts, and it was obvious that he would go for the London one first. ⁵⁰⁵I warned the inmates of the house, so as to avoid a second tragedy, and we went down with the happiest results. ⁵⁰⁶By that time, of course, I knew for certain that

it was the Borgia pearl that we were after. ⁵⁰⁷The name of the murdered man linked the one event with the other. ⁵⁰⁸There only remained a single bust—the Reading one—and the pearl must be there. ⁵⁰⁹I bought it in your presence from the owner—and there it lies.”

⁵¹⁰We sat in silence for a moment.

⁵¹¹“Well,” said Lestrade, “I’ve seen you handle a good many cases, Mr. Holmes, but I don’t know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. ⁵¹²We’re not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. ⁵¹³No, sir, we are very proud of you, and if you come down to-morrow there’s not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn’t be glad to shake you by the hand.”

⁵¹⁴“Thank you!” said Holmes. ⁵¹⁵“Thank you!” and as he turned away it seemed to me that he was more nearly moved by the softer human emotions than I had ever seen him. ⁵¹⁶A moment later he was the cold and practical thinker once more. ⁵¹⁷“Put the pearl in the safe, Watson,” said he, “and get out the papers of the Conk-Singleton forgery case. ⁵¹⁸Good-bye, Lestrade. ⁵¹⁹If any little problem comes your way I shall be happy, if I can, to give you a hint or two as to its solution.”

The Adventure of the Three Students

¹It was in the year '95 that a combination of events, into which I need not enter, caused Mr. Sherlock Holmes and myself to spend some weeks in one of our great University towns, and it was during this time that the small but instructive adventure which I am about to relate befell us. ²It will be obvious that any details which would help the reader to exactly identify the college or the criminal would be injudicious and offensive. ³So painful a scandal may well be allowed to die out. ⁴With due discretion the incident itself may, however, be described, since it serves to illustrate some of those qualities for which my friend was remarkable. ⁵I will endeavour in my statement to avoid such terms as would serve to limit the events to any particular place, or give a clue as to the people concerned.

⁶We were residing at the time in furnished lodgings close to a library where Sherlock Holmes was pursuing some laborious researches in early English charters—researches which led to results so striking that they may be the subject of one of my future narratives. ⁷Here it was that one evening we received a visit from an acquaintance, Mr. Hilton Soames, tutor and lecturer at the College of St. Luke's. ⁸Mr. Soames was a tall, spare man, of a nervous and excitable temperament. ⁹I had always known him to be restless in his manner, but on this particular occasion he was in such a state of uncontrollable agitation that it was clear something very unusual had occurred.

¹⁰“I trust, Mr. Holmes, that you can spare me a few hours of your valuable time. ¹¹We have had a very painful incident at St. Luke's, and really, but for the happy chance of your being in the town, I should have been at a loss what to do.”

¹²“I am very busy just now, and I desire no distractions,” my friend answered. ¹³“I should much prefer that you called in the aid of the police.”

¹⁴“No, no, my dear sir; such a course is utterly impossible. ¹⁵When once the law is evoked it cannot be stayed again, and this is just one of those cases where, for the credit of the college, it is most essential to avoid scandal. ¹⁶Your discretion is as well known as your powers, and you are the one man in the world who can help me. ¹⁷I beg you, Mr. Holmes, to do what you can.”

¹⁸My friend's temper had not improved since he had been deprived of the congenial surroundings of Baker Street. ¹⁹Without his scrap-books, his chemicals, and his homely untidiness, he was an uncomfortable man. ²⁰He shrugged his shoulders in ungracious acquiescence, while our visitor in hurried words and with much excitable gesticulation poured forth his story.

²¹“I must explain to you, Mr. Holmes, that to-morrow is the first day of the examination for the Fortescue Scholarship. ²²I am one of the examiners. ²³My subject is Greek, and the first of the papers consists of a large passage of Greek translation which the candidate has not seen. ²⁴This passage is printed on the examination paper, and it would naturally be an immense advantage if the candidate could prepare it in advance. ²⁵For this reason great care is taken to keep the paper secret.

²⁶“To-day about three o'clock the proofs of this paper arrived from the printers. ²⁷The exercise consists of half a chapter of Thucydides. ²⁸I had to read it over carefully, as the text must be absolutely correct. ²⁹At four-thirty my task was not yet completed. ³⁰I had, however, promised to take tea in a friend's rooms, so I left the proof upon my desk. ³¹I was absent rather more than an hour.

³²“You are aware, Mr. Holmes, that our college doors are double—a green baize one within and a heavy oak one without. ³³As I approached my outer door I was amazed to see a key in it. ³⁴For an instant I imagined that I had left my own there, but on feeling in my pocket I found that it was all right. ³⁵The only duplicate which existed, so far as I knew, was that which belonged to my servant, Bannister, a man who has looked after my room for ten years, and whose honesty is absolutely above suspicion. ³⁶I found

that the key was indeed his, that he had entered my room to know if I wanted tea, and that he had very carelessly left the key in the door when he came out. ³⁷His visit to my room must have been within a very few minutes of my leaving it. ³⁸His forgetfulness about the key would have mattered little upon any other occasion, but on this one day it has produced the most deplorable consequences.

³⁹“The moment I looked at my table I was aware that someone had rummaged among my papers. ⁴⁰The proof was in three long slips. ⁴¹I had left them all together. ⁴²Now, I found that one of them was lying on the floor, one was on the side table near the window, and the third was where I had left it.”

⁴³Holmes stirred for the first time.

⁴⁴“The first page on the floor, the second in the window, the third where you left it,” said he.

⁴⁵“Exactly, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁶You amaze me. ⁴⁷How could you possibly know that?”

⁴⁸“Pray continue your very interesting statement.”

⁴⁹“For an instant I imagined that Bannister had taken the unpardonable liberty of examining my papers. ⁵⁰He denied it, however, with the utmost earnestness, and I am convinced that he was speaking the truth. ⁵¹The alternative was that someone passing had observed the key in the door, had known that I was out, and had entered to look at the papers. ⁵²A large sum of money is at stake, for the scholarship is a very valuable one, and an unscrupulous man might very well run a risk in order to gain an advantage over his fellows.

⁵³“Bannister was very much upset by the incident. ⁵⁴He had nearly fainted when we found that the papers had undoubtedly been tampered with. ⁵⁵I gave him a little brandy and left him collapsed in a chair while I made a most careful examination of the room. ⁵⁶I soon saw that the intruder had left other traces of his presence besides the rumpled papers. ⁵⁷On the table in the window were several shreds from a pencil which had been sharpened. ⁵⁸A broken tip of lead was lying there also. ⁵⁹Evidently the rascal had copied the paper in a great hurry, had broken his pencil, and had been compelled to put a fresh point to it.”

⁶⁰“Excellent!” said Holmes, who was recovering his good-humour as his attention became more engrossed by the case. ⁶¹“Fortune has been your friend.”

⁶²“This was not all. ⁶³I have a new writing-table with a fine surface of red leather. ⁶⁴I am prepared to swear, and so is Bannister, that it was smooth and unstained. ⁶⁵Now I found a clean cut in it about three inches long—not a mere scratch, but a positive cut. ⁶⁶Not only this, but on the table I found a small ball of black dough, or clay, with specks of something which looks like sawdust in it. ⁶⁷I am convinced that these marks were left by the man who rifled the papers. ⁶⁸There were no footmarks and no other evidence as to his identity. ⁶⁹I was at my wits' ends, when suddenly the happy thought occurred to me that you were in the town, and I came straight round to put the matter into your hands. ⁷⁰Do help me, Mr. Holmes! ⁷¹You see my dilemma. ⁷²Either I must find the man or else the examination must be postponed until fresh papers are prepared, and since this cannot be done without explanation there will ensue a hideous scandal, which will throw a cloud not only on the college, but on the University. ⁷³Above all things I desire to settle the matter quietly and discreetly.”

⁷⁴“I shall be happy to look into it and to give you such advice as I can,” said Holmes, rising and putting on his overcoat. ⁷⁵“The case is not entirely devoid of interest. ⁷⁶Had anyone visited you in your room after the papers came to you?”

⁷⁷“Yes; young Daulat Ras, an Indian student who lives on the same stair, came in to ask me some particulars about the examination.”

⁷⁸“For which he was entered?”

⁷⁹“Yes.”

⁸⁰“And the papers were on your table?”

⁸¹“To the best of my belief they were rolled up.”

⁸²“But might be recognised as proofs?”

⁸³“Possibly.”

⁸⁴“No one else in your room?”

⁸⁵“No.”

⁸⁶“Did anyone know that these proofs would be there?”

⁸⁷“No one save the printer.”

⁸⁸“Did this man Bannister know?”

⁸⁹“No, certainly not. ⁹⁰No one knew.”

⁹¹“Where is Bannister now?”

⁹²“He was very ill, poor fellow. ⁹³I left him collapsed in the chair. ⁹⁴I was in such a hurry to come to you.”

⁹⁵“You left your door open?”

⁹⁶“I locked up the papers first.”

⁹⁷“Then it amounts to this, Mr. Soames, that unless the Indian student recognised the roll as being proofs, the man who tampered with them came upon them accidentally without knowing that they were there.”

⁹⁸“So it seems to me.”

⁹⁹Holmes gave an enigmatic smile.

¹⁰⁰“Well,” said he, “let us go round. ¹⁰¹Not one of your cases, Watson—mental, not physical. ¹⁰²All right; come if you want to. ¹⁰³Now, Mr. Soames—at your disposal!”

¹⁰⁴The sitting-room of our client opened by a long, low, latticed window on to the ancient lichen-tinted court of the old college. ¹⁰⁵A Gothic arched door led to a worn stone staircase. ¹⁰⁶On the ground floor was the tutor's room. ¹⁰⁷Above were three students, one on each story. ¹⁰⁸It was already twilight when we reached the scene of our problem. ¹⁰⁹Holmes halted and looked earnestly at the window. ¹¹⁰Then he approached it, and, standing on tiptoe with his neck craned, he looked into the room.

¹¹¹“He must have entered through the door. ¹¹²There is no opening except the one pane,” said our learned guide.

¹¹³“Dear me!” said Holmes, and he smiled in a singular way as he glanced at our companion. ¹¹⁴“Well, if there is nothing to be learned here we had best go inside.”

¹¹⁵The lecturer unlocked the outer door and ushered us into his room. ¹¹⁶We stood at the entrance while Holmes made an examination of the carpet.

¹¹⁷“I am afraid there are no signs here,” said he. ¹¹⁸“One could hardly hope for any upon so dry a day.

¹¹⁹Your servant seems to have quite recovered. ¹²⁰You left him in a chair, you say; which chair?”

¹²¹“By the window there.”

¹²²“I see. ¹²³Near this little table. ¹²⁴You can come in now. ¹²⁵I have finished with the carpet. ¹²⁶Let us take the little table first. ¹²⁷Of course, what has happened is very clear. ¹²⁸The man entered and took the papers, sheet by sheet, from the central table. ¹²⁹He carried them over to the window table, because from there he could see if you came across the courtyard, and so could effect an escape.”

¹³⁰“As a matter of fact he could not,” said Soames, “for I entered by the side door.”

¹³¹“Ah, that's good! ¹³²Well, anyhow, that was in his mind. ¹³³Let me see the three strips. ¹³⁴No finger impressions—no! ¹³⁵Well, he carried over this one first and he copied it. ¹³⁶How long would it take him to do that, using every possible contraction? ¹³⁷A quarter of an hour, not less. ¹³⁸Then he tossed it down and seized the next. ¹³⁹He was in the midst of that when your return caused him to make a very hurried retreat—very hurried, since he had not time to replace the papers which would tell you that he had been there. ¹⁴⁰You were not aware of any hurrying feet on the stair as you entered the outer door?”

¹⁴¹“No, I can't say I was.”

¹⁴²“Well, he wrote so furiously that he broke his pencil, and had, as you observe, to sharpen it again. ¹⁴³This is of interest, Watson. ¹⁴⁴The pencil was not an ordinary one. ¹⁴⁵It was above the usual size, with a soft lead; the outer colour was dark blue, the maker's name was printed in silver lettering, and the piece remaining is only about an inch and a half long. ¹⁴⁶Look for such a pencil, Mr. Soames, and you have got your man. ¹⁴⁷When I add that he possesses a large and very blunt knife, you have an additional aid.”

¹⁴⁸Mr. Soames was somewhat overwhelmed by this flood of information. ¹⁴⁹“I can follow the other points,” said he, “but really, in this matter of the length—”

¹⁵⁰Holmes held out a small chip with the letters NN and a space of clear wood after them.

¹⁵¹“You see?”

¹⁵²“No, I fear that even now—”

¹⁵³“Watson, I have always done you an injustice. ¹⁵⁴There are others. ¹⁵⁵What could this NN be? ¹⁵⁶It is at the end of a word. ¹⁵⁷You are aware that Johann Faber is the most common maker's name. ¹⁵⁸Is it not clear that there is just as much of the pencil left as usually follows the Johann?” ¹⁵⁹He held the small table sideways to the electric light. ¹⁶⁰“I was hoping that if the paper on which he wrote was thin some trace of it might come through upon this polished surface. ¹⁶¹No, I see nothing. ¹⁶²I don't think there is anything more to be learned here. ¹⁶³Now for the central table. ¹⁶⁴This small pellet is, I presume, the black, doughy mass you spoke of. ¹⁶⁵Roughly pyramidal in shape and hollowed out, I perceive. ¹⁶⁶As you say, there appear to be grains of sawdust in it. ¹⁶⁷Dear me, this is very interesting. ¹⁶⁸And the cut—a positive tear, I see. ¹⁶⁹It began with a thin scratch and ended in a jagged hole. ¹⁷⁰I am much indebted to you for directing my attention to this case, Mr. Soames. ¹⁷¹Where does that door lead to?”

¹⁷²“To my bedroom.”

¹⁷³“Have you been in it since your adventure?”

¹⁷⁴“No; I came straight away for you.”

¹⁷⁵“I should like to have a glance round. ¹⁷⁶What a charming, old-fashioned room! ¹⁷⁷Perhaps you will kindly wait a minute until I have examined the floor. ¹⁷⁸No, I see nothing. ¹⁷⁹What about this curtain? ¹⁸⁰You hang your clothes behind it. ¹⁸¹If anyone were forced to conceal himself in this room he must do it there, since the bed is too low and the wardrobe too shallow. ¹⁸²No one there, I suppose?”

¹⁸³As Holmes drew the curtain I was aware, from some little rigidity and alertness of his attitude, that he was prepared for an emergency. ¹⁸⁴As a matter of fact the drawn curtain disclosed nothing but three

or four suits of clothes hanging from a line of pegs. ¹⁸⁵Holmes turned away and stooped suddenly to the floor.

¹⁸⁶“Halloa! ¹⁸⁷What's this?” said he.

¹⁸⁸It was a small pyramid of black, putty-like stuff, exactly like the one upon the table of the study.

¹⁸⁹Holmes held it out on his open palm in the glare of the electric light.

¹⁹⁰“Your visitor seems to have left traces in your bedroom as well as in your sitting-room, Mr. Soames.”

¹⁹¹“What could he have wanted there?”

¹⁹²“I think it is clear enough. ¹⁹³You came back by an unexpected way, and so he had no warning until you were at the very door. ¹⁹⁴What could he do? ¹⁹⁵He caught up everything which would betray him and he rushed into your bedroom to conceal himself.”

¹⁹⁶“Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, do you mean to tell me that all the time I was talking to Bannister in this room we had the man prisoner if we had only known it?”

¹⁹⁷“So I read it.”

¹⁹⁸“Surely there is another alternative, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁹⁹I don't know whether you observed my bedroom window?”

²⁰⁰“Lattice-paned, lead framework, three separate windows, one swinging on hinge and large enough to admit a man.”

²⁰¹“Exactly. ²⁰²And it looks out on an angle of the courtyard so as to be partly invisible. ²⁰³The man might have effected his entrance there, left traces as he passed through the bedroom, and, finally, finding the door open have escaped that way.”

²⁰⁴Holmes shook his head impatiently.

²⁰⁵“Let us be practical,” said he. ²⁰⁶“I understand you to say that there are three students who use this stair and are in the habit of passing your door?”

²⁰⁷“Yes, there are.”

²⁰⁸“And they are all in for this examination?”

²⁰⁹“Yes.”

²¹⁰“Have you any reason to suspect any one of them more than the others?”

²¹¹Soames hesitated.

²¹²“It is a very delicate question,” said he. ²¹³“One hardly likes to throw suspicion where there are no proofs.”

²¹⁴“Let us hear the suspicions. ²¹⁵I will look after the proofs.”

²¹⁶“I will tell you, then, in a few words the character of the three men who inhabit these rooms. ²¹⁷The lower of the three is Gilchrist, a fine scholar and athlete; plays in the Rugby team and the cricket team for the college, and got his Blue for the hurdles and the long jump. ²¹⁸He is a fine, manly fellow. ²¹⁹His father was the notorious Sir Jabez Gilchrist, who ruined himself on the turf. ²²⁰My scholar has been left very poor, but he is hard-working and industrious. ²²¹He will do well.

²²²“The second floor is inhabited by Daulat Ras, the Indian. ²²³He is a quiet, inscrutable fellow, as most of those Indians are. ²²⁴He is well up in his work, though his Greek is his weak subject. ²²⁵He is steady and methodical.

²²⁶“The top floor belongs to Miles McLaren. ²²⁷He is a brilliant fellow when he chooses to work—one of the brightest intellects of the University, but he is wayward, dissipated, and unprincipled. ²²⁸He was nearly expelled over a card scandal in his first year. ²²⁹He has been idling all this term, and he must look forward with dread to the examination.”

²³⁰“Then it is he whom you suspect?”

²³¹“I dare not go so far as that. ²³²But of the three he is perhaps the least unlikely.”

²³³“Exactly. ²³⁴Now, Mr. Soames, let us have a look at your servant, Bannister.”

²³⁵He was a little, white-faced, clean-shaven, grizzly-haired fellow of fifty. ²³⁶He was still suffering from this sudden disturbance of the quiet routine of his life. ²³⁷His plump face was twitching with his nervousness, and his fingers could not keep still.

²³⁸“We are investigating this unhappy business, Bannister,” said his master.

²³⁹“Yes, sir.”

²⁴⁰“I understand,” said Holmes, “that you left your key in the door?”

²⁴¹“Yes, sir.”

²⁴²“Was it not very extraordinary that you should do this on the very day when there were these papers inside?”

²⁴³“It was most unfortunate, sir. ²⁴⁴But I have occasionally done the same thing at other times.”

²⁴⁵“When did you enter the room?”

²⁴⁶“It was about half-past four. ²⁴⁷That is Mr. Soames's tea time.”

²⁴⁸“How long did you stay?”

²⁴⁹“When I saw that he was absent I withdrew at once.”

²⁵⁰“Did you look at these papers on the table?”

²⁵¹“No, sir; certainly not.”

²⁵²“How came you to leave the key in the door?”

²⁵³“I had the tea-tray in my hand. ²⁵⁴I thought I would come back for the key. ²⁵⁵Then I forgot.”

²⁵⁶“Has the outer door a spring lock?”

²⁵⁷“No, sir.”

²⁵⁸“Then it was open all the time?”

²⁵⁹“Yes, sir.”

²⁶⁰“Anyone in the room could get out?”

²⁶¹“Yes, sir.”

²⁶²“When Mr. Soames returned and called for you, you were very much disturbed?”

²⁶³“Yes, sir. ¹⁶⁴Such a thing has never happened during the many years that I have been here. ²⁶⁵I nearly fainted, sir.”

²⁶⁶“So I understand. ²⁶⁷Where were you when you began to feel bad?”

²⁶⁸“Where was I, sir? ²⁶⁹Why, here, near the door.”

²⁷⁰“That is singular, because you sat down in that chair over yonder near the corner. ²⁷¹Why did you pass these other chairs?”

²⁷²“I don't know, sir. ²⁷³It didn't matter to me where I sat.”

²⁷⁴“I really don't think he knew much about it, Mr. Holmes. ²⁷⁵He was looking very bad—quite ghastly.”

²⁷⁶“You stayed here when your master left?”

²⁷⁷“Only for a minute or so. ²⁷⁸Then I locked the door and went to my room.”

²⁷⁹“Whom do you suspect?”

²⁸⁰“Oh, I would not venture to say, sir. ²⁸¹I don't believe there is any gentleman in this University who is capable of profiting by such an action. ²⁸²No, sir, I'll not believe it.”

²⁸³“Thank you; that will do,” said Holmes. ²⁸⁴“Oh, one more word. ²⁸⁵You have not mentioned to any of the three gentlemen whom you attend that anything is amiss?”

²⁸⁶“No, sir; not a word.”

²⁸⁷“You haven't seen any of them?”

²⁸⁸“No, sir.”

²⁸⁹“Very good. ²⁹⁰Now, Mr. Soames, we will take a walk in the quadrangle, if you please.”

²⁹¹Three yellow squares of light shone above us in the gathering gloom.

²⁹²“Your three birds are all in their nests,” said Holmes, looking up. ²⁹³“Halloa! ²⁹⁴What's that? ²⁹⁵One of them seems restless enough.”

²⁹⁶It was the Indian, whose dark silhouette appeared suddenly upon his blind. ²⁹⁷He was pacing swiftly up and down his room.

²⁹⁸“I should like to have a peep at each of them,” said Holmes. ²⁹⁹“Is it possible?”

³⁰⁰“No difficulty in the world,” Soames answered. ³⁰¹“This set of rooms is quite the oldest in the college, and it is not unusual for visitors to go over them. ³⁰²Come along, and I will personally conduct you.”

³⁰³“No names, please!” said Holmes, as we knocked at Gilchrist's door. ³⁰⁴A tall, flaxen-haired, slim young fellow opened it, and made us welcome when he understood our errand. ³⁰⁵There were some really curious pieces of mediaeval domestic architecture within. ³⁰⁶Holmes was so charmed with one of them that he insisted on drawing it on his note-book, broke his pencil, had to borrow one from our host, and finally borrowed a knife to sharpen his own. ³⁰⁷The same curious accident happened to him in the rooms of the Indian—a silent, little, hook-nosed fellow, who eyed us askance and was obviously glad when Holmes's architectural studies had come to an end. ³⁰⁸I could not see that in either case Holmes had come upon the clue for which he was searching. ³⁰⁹Only at the third did our visit prove abortive. ³¹⁰The outer door would not open to our knock, and nothing more substantial than a torrent of bad language came from behind it. ³¹¹“I don't care who you are. ³¹²You can go to blazes!” roared the angry voice. ³¹³“To-morrow's the exam, and I won't be drawn by anyone.”

³¹⁴“A rude fellow,” said our guide, flushing with anger as we withdrew down the stair. ³¹⁵“Of course, he did not realize that it was I who was knocking, but none the less his conduct was very uncourteous, and, indeed, under the circumstances rather suspicious.”

³¹⁶Holmes's response was a curious one.

³¹⁷“Can you tell me his exact height?” he asked.

³¹⁸“Really, Mr. Holmes, I cannot undertake to say. ³¹⁹He is taller than the Indian, not so tall as Gilchrist. ³²⁰I suppose five foot six would be about it.”

³²¹“That is very important,” said Holmes. ³²²“And now, Mr. Soames, I wish you good-night.”

³²³Our guide cried aloud in his astonishment and dismay. ³²⁴“Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, you are surely not going to leave me in this abrupt fashion! ³²⁵You don't seem to realize the position. ³²⁶To-morrow is the examination. ³²⁷I must take some definite action to-night. ³²⁸I cannot allow the examination to be held if one of the papers has been tampered with. ³²⁹The situation must be faced.”

³³⁰“You must leave it as it is. I shall drop round early to-morrow morning and chat the matter over. ³³¹It is possible that I may be in a position then to indicate some course of action. ³³²Meanwhile you change nothing—nothing at all.”

³³³“Very good, Mr. Holmes.”

³³⁴“You can be perfectly easy in your mind. ³³⁵We shall certainly find some way out of your difficulties. ³³⁶I will take the black clay with me, also the pencil cuttings. ³³⁷Good-bye.”

³³⁸When we were out in the darkness of the quadrangle we again looked up at the windows. ³³⁹The Indian still paced his room. ³⁴⁰The others were invisible.

³⁴¹“Well, Watson, what do you think of it?” Holmes asked, as we came out into the main street. ³⁴²“Quite a little parlour game—sort of three-card trick, is it not? ³⁴³There are your three men. ³⁴⁴It must be one of them. ³⁴⁵You take your choice. ³⁴⁶Which is yours?”

³⁴⁷“The foul-mouthed fellow at the top. ³⁴⁸He is the one with the worst record. ³⁴⁹And yet that Indian was a sly fellow also. ³⁵⁰Why should he be pacing his room all the time?”

³⁵¹“There is nothing in that. ³⁵²Many men do it when they are trying to learn anything by heart.”

³⁵³“He looked at us in a queer way.”

³⁵⁴“So would you if a flock of strangers came in on you when you were preparing for an examination next day, and every moment was of value. ³⁵⁵No, I see nothing in that. ³⁵⁶Pencils, too, and knives—all was satisfactory. ³⁵⁷But that fellow does puzzle me.”

³⁵⁸“Who?”

³⁵⁹“Why, Bannister, the servant. ³⁶⁰What's his game in the matter?”

³⁶¹“He impressed me as being a perfectly honest man.”

³⁶²“So he did me. ³⁶³That's the puzzling part. ³⁶⁴Why should a perfectly honest man—well, well, here's a large stationer's. ³⁶⁵We shall begin our researches here.”

³⁶⁶There were only four stationers of any consequence in the town, and at each Holmes produced his pencil chips and bid high for a duplicate. ³⁶⁷All were agreed that one could be ordered, but that it was not a usual size of pencil and that it was seldom kept in stock. ³⁶⁸My friend did not appear to be depressed by his failure, but shrugged his shoulders in half-humorous resignation.

³⁶⁹“No good, my dear Watson. ³⁷⁰This, the best and only final clue, has run to nothing. ³⁷¹But, indeed, I have little doubt that we can build up a sufficient case without it. ³⁷²By Jove! my dear fellow, it is nearly nine, and the landlady babbled of green peas at seven-thirty. ³⁷³What with your eternal tobacco, Watson, and your irregularity at meals, I expect that you will get notice to quit and that I shall share your downfall—not, however, before we have solved the problem of the nervous tutor, the careless servant, and the three enterprising students.”

³⁷⁴Holmes made no further allusion to the matter that day, though he sat lost in thought for a long time after our belated dinner. ³⁷⁵At eight in the morning he came into my room just as I finished my toilet.

³⁷⁶“Well, Watson,” said he, “it is time we went down to St. Luke’s. ³⁷⁷Can you do without breakfast?”

³⁷⁸“Certainly.”

³⁷⁹“Soames will be in a dreadful fidget until we are able to tell him something positive.”

³⁸⁰“Have you anything positive to tell him?”

³⁸¹“I think so.”

³⁸²“You have formed a conclusion?”

³⁸³“Yes, my dear Watson; I have solved the mystery.”

³⁸⁴“But what fresh evidence could you have got?”

³⁸⁵“Aha! ³⁸⁶It is not for nothing that I have turned myself out of bed at the untimely hour of six. ³⁸⁷I have put in two hours’ hard work and covered at least five miles, with something to show for it. ³⁸⁸Look at that!”

³⁸⁹He held out his hand. ³⁹⁰On the palm were three little pyramids of black, doughy clay.

³⁹¹“Why, Holmes, you had only two yesterday!”

³⁹²“And one more this morning. ³⁹³It is a fair argument that wherever No. 3 came from is also the source of Nos. 1 and 2. ³⁹⁴Eh, Watson? ³⁹⁵Well, come along and put friend Soames out of his pain.”

³⁹⁶The unfortunate tutor was certainly in a state of pitiable agitation when we found him in his chambers. ³⁹⁷In a few hours the examination would commence, and he was still in the dilemma between making the facts public and allowing the culprit to compete for the valuable scholarship. ³⁹⁸He could hardly stand still, so great was his mental agitation, and he ran towards Holmes with two eager hands outstretched.

³⁹⁹“Thank Heaven that you have come! ⁴⁰⁰I feared that you had given it up in despair. ⁴⁰¹What am I to do? ⁴⁰²Shall the examination proceed?”

⁴⁰³“Yes; let it proceed by all means.”

⁴⁰⁴“But this rascal—?”

⁴⁰⁵“He shall not compete.”

⁴⁰⁶“You know him?”

⁴⁰⁷“I think so. ⁴⁰⁸If this matter is not to become public we must give ourselves certain powers, and resolve ourselves into a small private court-martial. ⁴⁰⁹You there, if you please, Soames! ⁴¹⁰Watson, you here! ⁴¹¹I’ll take the arm-chair in the middle. ⁴¹²I think that we are now sufficiently imposing to strike terror into a guilty breast. ⁴¹³Kindly ring the bell!”

⁴¹⁴Bannister entered, and shrunk back in evident surprise and fear at our judicial appearance.

⁴¹⁵“You will kindly close the door,” said Holmes. ⁴¹⁶“Now, Bannister, will you please tell us the truth about yesterday's incident?”

⁴¹⁷The man turned white to the roots of his hair.

⁴¹⁸“I have told you everything, sir.”

⁴¹⁹“Nothing to add?”

⁴²⁰“Nothing at all, sir.”

⁴²¹“Well, then, I must make some suggestions to you. ⁴²²When you sat down on that chair yesterday, did you do so in order to conceal some object which would have shown who had been in the room?”

⁴²³Bannister's face was ghastly.

⁴²⁴“No, sir; certainly not.”

⁴²⁵“It is only a suggestion,” said Holmes, suavely. ⁴²⁶“I frankly admit that I am unable to prove it. ⁴²⁷But it seems probable enough, since the moment that Mr. Soames's back was turned you released the man who was hiding in that bedroom.”

⁴²⁸Bannister licked his dry lips.

⁴²⁹“There was no man, sir.”

⁴³⁰“Ah, that's a pity, Bannister. ⁴³¹Up to now you may have spoken the truth, but now I know that you have lied.”

⁴³²The man's face set in sullen defiance.

⁴³³“There was no man, sir.”

⁴³⁴“Come, come, Bannister!”

⁴³⁵“No, sir; there was no one.”

⁴³⁶“In that case you can give us no further information. ⁴³⁷Would you please remain in the room? ⁴³⁸Stand over there near the bedroom door. ⁴³⁹Now, Soames, I am going to ask you to have the great kindness to go up to the room of young Gilchrist, and to ask him to step down into yours.”

⁴⁴⁰An instant later the tutor returned, bringing with him the student. ⁴⁴¹He was a fine figure of a man, tall, lithe, and agile, with a springy step and a pleasant, open face. ⁴⁴²His troubled blue eyes glanced at each of us, and finally rested with an expression of blank dismay upon Bannister in the farther corner.

⁴⁴³“Just close the door,” said Holmes. ⁴⁴⁴“Now, Mr. Gilchrist, we are all quite alone here, and no one need ever know one word of what passes between us. ⁴⁴⁵We can be perfectly frank with each other. ⁴⁴⁶We want to know, Mr. Gilchrist, how you, an honourable man, ever came to commit such an action as that of yesterday?”

⁴⁴⁷The unfortunate young man staggered back and cast a look full of horror and reproach at Bannister.

⁴⁴⁸“No, no, Mr. Gilchrist, sir; I never said a word—never one word!” cried the servant.

⁴⁴⁹“No, but you have now,” said Holmes. ⁴⁵⁰“Now, sir, you must see that after Bannister's words your position is hopeless, and that your only chance lies in a frank confession.”

⁴⁵¹For a moment Gilchrist, with upraised hand, tried to control his writhing features. ⁴⁵²The next he had thrown himself on his knees beside the table and, burying his face in his hands, he had burst into a storm of passionate sobbing.

⁴⁵³“Come, come,” said Holmes, kindly; “it is human to err, and at least no one can accuse you of being a callous criminal. ⁴⁵⁴Perhaps it would be easier for you if I were to tell Mr. Soames what occurred, and you can check me where I am wrong. ⁴⁵⁵Shall I do so? ⁴⁵⁶Well, well, don’t trouble to answer. ⁴⁵⁷Listen, and see that I do you no injustice.

⁴⁵⁸“From the moment, Mr. Soames, that you said to me that no one, not even Bannister, could have told that the papers were in your room, the case began to take a definite shape in my mind. ⁴⁵⁹The printer one could, of course, dismiss. ⁴⁶⁰He could examine the papers in his own office. ⁴⁶¹The Indian I also thought nothing of. ⁴⁶²If the proofs were in a roll he could not possibly know what they were. ⁴⁶³On the other hand, it seemed an unthinkable coincidence that a man should dare to enter the room, and that by chance on that very day the papers were on the table. ⁴⁶⁴I dismissed that. ⁴⁶⁵The man who entered knew that the papers were there. ⁴⁶⁶How did he know?

⁴⁶⁷“When I approached your room I examined the window. ⁴⁶⁸You amused me by supposing that I was contemplating the possibility of someone having in broad daylight, under the eyes of all these opposite rooms, forced himself through it. ⁴⁶⁹Such an idea was absurd. ⁴⁷⁰I was measuring how tall a man would need to be in order to see as he passed what papers were on the central table. ⁴⁷¹I am six feet high, and I could do it with an effort. ⁴⁷²No one less than that would have a chance. ⁴⁷³Already you see I had reason to think that if one of your three students was a man of unusual height he was the most worth watching of the three.

⁴⁷⁴“I entered and I took you into my confidence as to the suggestions of the side table. ⁴⁷⁵Of the centre table I could make nothing, until in your description of Gilchrist you mentioned that he was a long-distance jumper. ⁴⁷⁶Then the whole thing came to me in an instant, and I only needed certain corroborative proofs, which I speedily obtained.

⁴⁷⁷“What happened was this. ⁴⁷⁸This young fellow had employed his afternoon at the athletic grounds, where he had been practising the jump. ⁴⁷⁹He returned carrying his jumping shoes, which are provided, as you are aware, with several sharp spikes. ⁴⁸⁰As he passed your window he saw, by means of his great height, these proofs upon your table, and conjectured what they were. ⁴⁸¹No harm would have been done had it not been that as he passed your door he perceived the key which had been left by the carelessness of your servant. ⁴⁸²A sudden impulse came over him to enter and see if they were indeed the proofs. ⁴⁸³It was not a dangerous exploit, for he could always pretend that he had simply looked in to ask a question.

⁴⁸⁴“Well, when he saw that they were indeed the proofs, it was then that he yielded to temptation. ⁴⁸⁵He put his shoes on the table. ⁴⁸⁶What was it you put on that chair near the window?”

⁴⁸⁷“Gloves,” said the young man.

⁴⁸⁸Holmes looked triumphantly at Bannister. ⁴⁸⁹“He put his gloves on the chair, and he took the proofs, sheet by sheet, to copy them. ⁴⁹⁰He thought the tutor must return by the main gate, and that he would see him. ⁴⁹¹As we know, he came back by the side gate. ⁴⁹²Suddenly he heard him at the very door. ⁴⁹³There was no possible escape. ⁴⁹⁴He forgot his gloves, but he caught up his shoes and darted into the bedroom. ⁴⁹⁵You observe that the scratch on that table is slight at one side, but deepens in the direction of the bedroom door. ⁴⁹⁶That in itself is enough to show us that the shoe had been drawn in that direction and that the culprit had taken refuge there. ⁴⁹⁷The earth round the spike had been left on the table, and a second sample was loosened and fell in the bedroom. ⁴⁹⁸I may add that I walked out to the athletic grounds this morning, saw that tenacious black clay is used in the jumping-pit, and carried away a

specimen of it, together with some of the fine tan or sawdust which is strewn over it to prevent the athlete from slipping. ⁴⁹⁹Have I told the truth, Mr. Gilchrist?"

⁵⁰⁰The student had drawn himself erect.

⁵⁰¹"Yes, sir, it is true," said he.

⁵⁰²"Good heavens, have you nothing to add?" cried Soames.

⁵⁰³"Yes, sir, I have, but the shock of this disgraceful exposure has bewildered me. ⁵⁰⁴I have a letter here, Mr. Soames, which I wrote to you early this morning in the middle of a restless night. ⁵⁰⁵It was before I knew that my sin had found me out. ⁵⁰⁶Here it is, sir. ⁵⁰⁷You will see that I have said, 'I have determined not to go in for the examination. ⁵⁰⁸I have been offered a commission in the Rhodesian Police, and I am going out to South Africa at once.'"

⁵⁰⁹"I am indeed pleased to hear that you did not intend to profit by your unfair advantage," said Soames.

⁵¹⁰"But why did you change your purpose?"

⁵¹¹Gilchrist pointed to Bannister.

⁵¹²"There is the man who set me in the right path," said he.

⁵¹³"Come now, Bannister," said Holmes. ⁵¹⁴"It will be clear to you from what I have said that only you could have let this young man out, since you were left in the room, and must have locked the door when you went out. ⁵¹⁵As to his escaping by that window, it was incredible. ⁵¹⁶Can you not clear up the last point in this mystery, and tell us the reasons for your action?"

⁵¹⁷"It was simple enough, sir, if you only had known; but with all your cleverness it was impossible that you could know. ⁵¹⁸Time was, sir, when I was butler to old Sir Jabez Gilchrist, this young gentleman's father. ⁵¹⁹When he was ruined I came to the college as servant, but I never forgot my old employer because he was down in the world. ⁵²⁰I watched his son all I could for the sake of the old days. ⁵²¹Well, sir, when I came into this room yesterday when the alarm was given, the very first thing I saw was Mr. Gilchrist's tan gloves a-lying in that chair. ⁵²²I knew those gloves well, and I understood their message. ⁵²³If Mr. Soames saw them the game was up. ⁵²⁴I flopped down into that chair, and nothing would budge me until Mr. Soames he went for you. ⁵²⁵Then out came my poor young master, whom I had dandled on my knee, and confessed it all to me. ⁵²⁶Wasn't it natural, sir, that I should save him, and wasn't it natural also that I should try to speak to him as his dead father would have done, and make him understand that he could not profit by such a deed? ⁵²⁷Could you blame me, sir?"

⁵²⁸"No, indeed," said Holmes, heartily, springing to his feet. ⁵²⁹"Well, Soames, I think we have cleared your little problem up, and our breakfast awaits us at home. ⁵³⁰Come, Watson! ⁵³¹As to you, sir, I trust that a bright future awaits you in Rhodesia. ⁵³²For once you have fallen low. ⁵³³Let us see in the future how high you can rise."

The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez

¹When I look at the three massive manuscript volumes which contain our work for the year 1894 I confess that it is very difficult for me, out of such a wealth of material, to select the cases which are most interesting in themselves and at the same time most conducive to a display of those peculiar powers for which my friend was famous. ²As I turn over the pages I see my notes upon the repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby the banker. ³Here also I find an account of the Addleton tragedy and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow. ⁴The famous Smith-Mortimer succession case comes also within this period, and so does the tracking and arrest of Huret, the Boulevard assassin—an exploit which won for Holmes an autograph letter of thanks from the French President and the Order of the Legion of Honour. ⁵Each of these would furnish a narrative, but on the whole I am of opinion that none of them unite so many singular points of interest as the episode of Yoxley Old Place, which includes not only the lamentable death of young Willoughby Smith, but also those subsequent developments which threw so curious a light upon the causes of the crime.

⁶It was a wild, tempestuous night towards the close of November. ⁷Holmes and I sat together in silence all the evening, he engaged with a powerful lens deciphering the remains of the original inscription upon a palimpsest, I deep in a recent treatise upon surgery. ⁸Outside the wind howled down Baker Street, while the rain beat fiercely against the windows. ⁹It was strange there in the very depths of the town, with ten miles of man's handiwork on every side of us, to feel the iron grip of Nature, and to be conscious that to the huge elemental forces all London was no more than the molehills that dot the fields. ¹⁰I walked to the window and looked out on the deserted street. ¹¹The occasional lamps gleamed on the expanse of muddy road and shining pavement. ¹²A single cab was splashing its way from the Oxford Street end.

¹³“Well, Watson, it's as well we have not to turn out to-night,” said Holmes, laying aside his lens and rolling up the palimpsest. ¹⁴“I've done enough for one sitting. ¹⁵It is trying work for the eyes. ¹⁶So far as I can make out it is nothing more exciting than an Abbey's accounts dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. ¹⁷Halloa! halloa! halloa! ¹⁸What's this?”

¹⁹Amid the droning of the wind there had come the stamping of a horse's hoofs and the long grind of a wheel as it rasped against the kerb. ²⁰The cab which I had seen had pulled up at our door.

²¹“What can he want?” I ejaculated, as a man stepped out of it.

²²“Want! He wants us. ²³And we, my poor Watson, want overcoats and cravats and galoshes, and every aid that man ever invented to fight the weather. ²⁴Wait a bit, though! ²⁵There's the cab off again! ²⁶There's hope yet. ²⁷He'd have kept it if he had wanted us to come. ²⁸Run down, my dear fellow, and open the door, for all virtuous folk have been long in bed.”

²⁹When the light of the hall lamp fell upon our midnight visitor I had no difficulty in recognising him. ³⁰It was young Stanley Hopkins, a promising detective, in whose career Holmes had several times shown a very practical interest.

³¹“Is he in?” he asked, eagerly.

³²“Come up, my dear sir,” said Holmes's voice from above. ³³“I hope you have no designs upon us on such a night as this.”

³⁴The detective mounted the stairs, and our lamp gleamed upon his shining waterproof. ³⁵I helped him out of it while Holmes knocked a blaze out of the logs in the grate.

³⁶“Now, my dear Hopkins, draw up and warm your toes,” said he. ³⁷“Here's a cigar, and the doctor has a prescription containing hot water and a lemon which is good medicine on a night like this. ³⁸It must be something important which has brought you out in such a gale.”

³⁹“It is indeed, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁰I've had a bustling afternoon, I promise you. ⁴¹Did you see anything of the Yoxley case in the latest editions?”

⁴²“I've seen nothing later than the fifteenth century to-day.”

⁴³“Well, it was only a paragraph, and all wrong at that, so you have not missed anything. ⁴⁴I haven't let the grass grow under my feet. ⁴⁵It's down in Kent, seven miles from Chatham and three from the railway line. ⁴⁶I was wired for at three-fifteen, reached Yoxley Old Place at five, conducted my investigation, was back at Charing Cross by the last train, and straight to you by cab.”

⁴⁷“Which means, I suppose, that you are not quite clear about your case?”

⁴⁸“It means that I can make neither head nor tail of it. ⁴⁹So far as I can see it is just as tangled a business as ever I handled, and yet at first it seemed so simple that one couldn't go wrong. ⁵⁰There's no motive, Mr. Holmes. ⁵¹That's what bothers me—I can't put my hand on a motive. ⁵²Here's a man dead—there's no denying that—but, so far as I can see, no reason on earth why anyone should wish him harm.”

⁵³Holmes lit his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

⁵⁴“Let us hear about it,” said he.

⁵⁵“I've got my facts pretty clear,” said Stanley Hopkins. ⁵⁶“All I want now is to know what they all mean. ⁵⁷The story, so far as I can make it out, is like this. ⁵⁸Some years ago this country house, Yoxley Old Place, was taken by an elderly man, who gave the name of Professor Coram. ⁵⁹He was an invalid, keeping his bed half the time, and the other half hobbling round the house with a stick or being pushed about the grounds by the gardener in a bath-chair. ⁶⁰He was well liked by the few neighbours who called upon him, and he has the reputation down there of being a very learned man. ⁶¹His household used to consist of an elderly housekeeper, Mrs. Marker, and of a maid, Susan Tarlton. ⁶²These have both been with him since his arrival, and they seem to be women of excellent character. ⁶³The Professor is writing a learned book, and he found it necessary about a year ago to engage a secretary. ⁶⁴The first two that he tried were not successes; but the third, Mr. Willoughby Smith, a very young man straight from the University, seems to have been just what his employer wanted. ⁶⁵His work consisted in writing all the morning to the Professor's dictation, and he usually spent the evening in hunting up references and passages which bore upon the next day's work. ⁶⁶This Willoughby Smith has nothing against him either as a boy at Uppingham or as a young man at Cambridge. ⁶⁷I have seen his testimonials, and from the first he was a decent, quiet, hardworking fellow, with no weak spot in him at all. ⁶⁸And yet this is the lad who has met his death this morning in the Professor's study under circumstances which can point only to murder.”

⁶⁹The wind howled and screamed at the windows. ⁷⁰Holmes and I drew closer to the fire while the young inspector slowly and point by point developed his singular narrative.

⁷¹“If you were to search all England,” said he, “I don't suppose you could find a household more self-contained or free from outside influences. ⁷²Whole weeks would pass and not one of them go past the garden gate. ⁷³The Professor was buried in his work and existed for nothing else. ⁷⁴Young Smith knew nobody in the neighbourhood, and lived very much as his employer did. ⁷⁵The two women had nothing to take them from the house. ⁷⁶Mortimer the gardener, who wheels the bath-chair, is an Army pensioner—an old Crimean man of excellent character. ⁷⁷He does not live in the house, but in a three-roomed cottage at the other end of the garden. ⁷⁸Those are the only people that you would find within the grounds of Yoxley Old Place. ⁷⁹At the same time, the gate of the garden is a hundred yards from the

main London to Chatham road. ⁸⁰It opens with a latch, and there is nothing to prevent anyone from walking in.

⁸¹“Now I will give you the evidence of Susan Tarlton, who is the only person who can say anything positive about the matter. ⁸²It was in the forenoon, between eleven and twelve. ⁸³She was engaged at the moment in hanging some curtains in the upstairs front bedroom. ⁸⁴Professor Coram was still in bed, for when the weather is bad he seldom rises before midday. ⁸⁵The housekeeper was busied with some work in the back of the house. ⁸⁶Willoughby Smith had been in his bedroom, which he uses as a sitting-room; but the maid heard him at that moment pass along the passage and descend to the study immediately below her. ⁸⁷She did not see him, but she says that she could not be mistaken in his quick, firm tread. ⁸⁸She did not hear the study door close, but a minute or so later there was a dreadful cry in the room below. ⁸⁹It was a wild, hoarse scream, so strange and unnatural that it might have come either from a man or a woman. ⁹⁰At the same instant there was a heavy thud, which shook the old house, and then all was silence. ⁹¹The maid stood petrified for a moment, and then, recovering her courage, she ran downstairs. ⁹²The study door was shut, and she opened it. ⁹³Inside young Mr. Willoughby Smith was stretched upon the floor. ⁹⁴At first she could see no injury, but as she tried to raise him she saw that blood was pouring from the underside of his neck. ⁹⁵It was pierced by a very small but very deep wound, which had divided the carotid artery. ⁹⁶The instrument with which the injury had been inflicted lay upon the carpet beside him. ⁹⁷It was one of those small sealing-wax knives to be found on old-fashioned writing-tables, with an ivory handle and a stiff blade. ⁹⁸It was part of the fittings of the Professor's own desk.

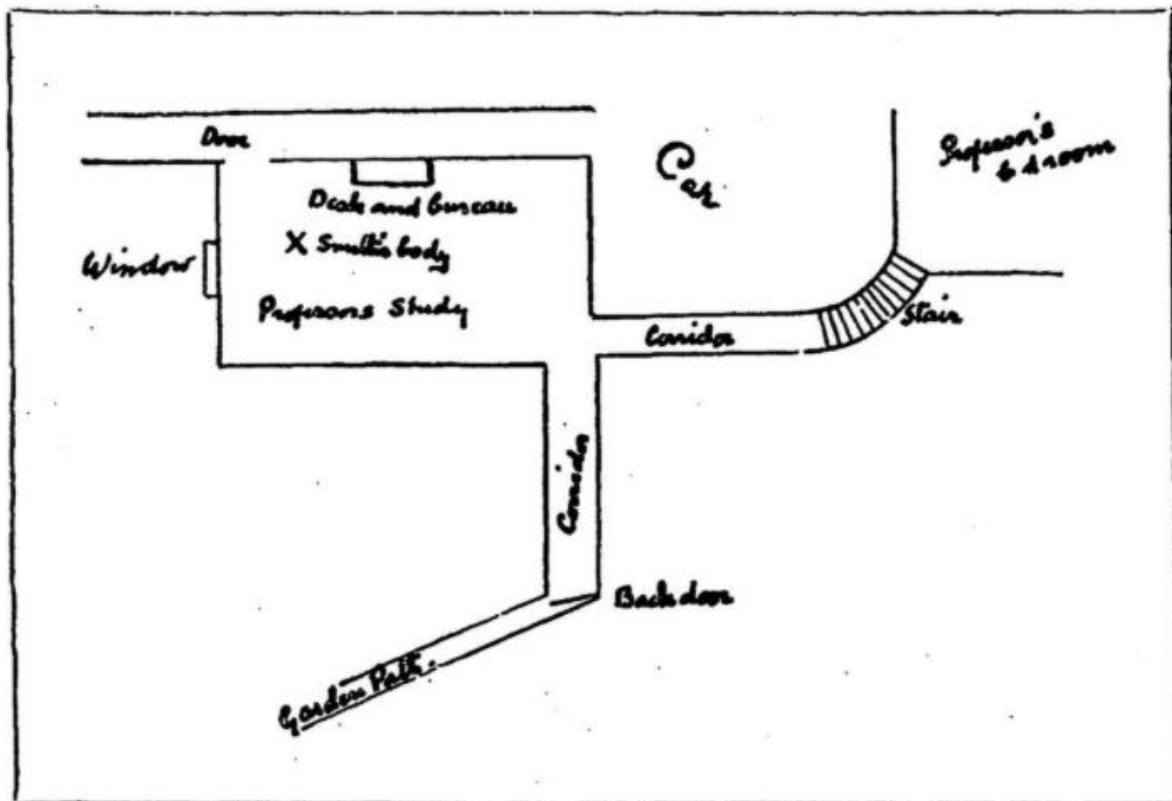
⁹⁹“At first the maid thought that young Smith was already dead, but on pouring some water from the carafe over his forehead he opened his eyes for an instant. ¹⁰⁰‘The Professor,’ he murmured—‘it was she.’ ¹⁰¹The maid is prepared to swear that those were the exact words. ¹⁰²He tried desperately to say something else, and he held his right hand up in the air. ¹⁰³Then he fell back dead.

¹⁰⁴“In the meantime the housekeeper had also arrived upon the scene, but she was just too late to catch the young man's dying words. ¹⁰⁵Leaving Susan with the body, she hurried to the Professor's room. ¹⁰⁶He was sitting up in bed horribly agitated, for he had heard enough to convince him that something terrible had occurred. ¹⁰⁷Mrs. Marker is prepared to swear that the Professor was still in his night-clothes, and, indeed, it was impossible for him to dress without the help of Mortimer, whose orders were to come at twelve o'clock. ¹⁰⁸The Professor declares that he heard the distant cry, but that he knows nothing more. ¹⁰⁹He can give no explanation of the young man's last words, ‘The Professor—it was she,’ but imagines that they were the outcome of delirium. ¹¹⁰He believes that Willoughby Smith had not an enemy in the world, and can give no reason for the crime. ¹¹¹His first action was to send Mortimer the gardener for the local police. ¹¹²A little later the chief constable sent for me. ¹¹³Nothing was moved before I got there, and strict orders were given that no one should walk upon the paths leading to the house. ¹¹⁴It was a splendid chance of putting your theories into practice, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ¹¹⁵There was really nothing wanting.”

¹¹⁶“Except Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said my companion, with a somewhat bitter smile. ¹¹⁷“Well, let us hear about it. ¹¹⁸What sort of job did you make of it?”

¹¹⁹“I must ask you first, Mr. Holmes, to glance at this rough plan, which will give you a general idea of the position of the Professor's study and the various points of the case. ¹²⁰It will help you in following my investigation.”

¹²¹He unfolded the rough chart, which I here reproduce, and he laid it across Holmes's knee. ¹²²I rose, and, standing behind Holmes, I studied it over his shoulder.



¹²³“It is very rough, of course, and it only deals with the points which seem to me to be essential. ¹²⁴All the rest you will see later for yourself. ¹²⁵Now, first of all, presuming that the assassin entered the house, how did he or she come in? ¹²⁶Undoubtedly by the garden path and the back door, from which there is direct access to the study. ¹²⁷Any other way would have been exceedingly complicated. ¹²⁸The escape must have also been made along that line, for of the two other exits from the room one was blocked by Susan as she ran downstairs and the other leads straight to the Professor's bedroom. ¹²⁹I therefore directed my attention at once to the garden path, which was saturated with recent rain and would certainly show any footmarks.

¹³⁰“My examination showed me that I was dealing with a cautious and expert criminal. ¹³¹No footmarks were to be found on the path. ¹³²There could be no question, however, that someone had passed along the grass border which lines the path, and that he had done so in order to avoid leaving a track. ¹³³I could not find anything in the nature of a distinct impression, but the grass was trodden down and someone had undoubtedly passed. ¹³⁴It could only have been the murderer, since neither the gardener nor anyone else had been there that morning and the rain had only begun during the night.”

¹³⁵“One moment,” said Holmes. ¹³⁶“Where does this path lead to?”

¹³⁷“To the road.”

¹³⁸“How long is it?”

¹³⁹“A hundred yards or so.”

¹⁴⁰“At the point where the path passes through the gate you could surely pick up the tracks?”

¹⁴¹“Unfortunately, the path was tiled at that point.”

¹⁴²“Well, on the road itself?”

¹⁴³“No; it was all trodden into mire.”

¹⁴⁴“Tut-tut! ¹⁴⁵Well, then, these tracks upon the grass, were they coming or going?”

¹⁴⁶“It was impossible to say. ¹⁴⁷There was never any outline.”

¹⁴⁸“A large foot or a small?”

¹⁴⁹“You could not distinguish.”

¹⁵⁰Holmes gave an ejaculation of impatience.

¹⁵¹“It has been pouring rain and blowing a hurricane ever since,” said he. ¹⁵²“It will be harder to read now than that palimpsest. ¹⁵³Well, well, it can't be helped. ¹⁵⁴What did you do, Hopkins, after you had made certain that you had made certain of nothing?”

¹⁵⁵“I think I made certain of a good deal, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁵⁶I knew that someone had entered the house cautiously from without. ¹⁵⁷I next examined the corridor. ¹⁵⁸It is lined with cocoanut matting and had taken no impression of any kind. ¹⁵⁹This brought me into the study itself. ¹⁶⁰It is a scantily-furnished room. ¹⁶¹The main article is a large writing-table with a fixed bureau. ¹⁶²This bureau consists of a double column of drawers with a central small cupboard between them. ¹⁶³The drawers were open, the cupboard locked. ¹⁶⁴The drawers, it seems, were always open, and nothing of value was kept in them. ¹⁶⁵There were some papers of importance in the cupboard, but there were no signs that this had been tampered with, and the Professor assures me that nothing was missing. ¹⁶⁶It is certain that no robbery has been committed.

¹⁶⁷“I come now to the body of the young man. ¹⁶⁸It was found near the bureau, and just to the left of it, as marked upon that chart. ¹⁶⁹The stab was on the right side of the neck and from behind forwards, so that it is almost impossible that it could have been self-inflicted.”

¹⁷⁰“Unless he fell upon the knife,” said Holmes.

¹⁷¹“Exactly. ¹⁷²The idea crossed my mind. ¹⁷³But we found the knife some feet away from the body, so that seems impossible. ¹⁷⁴Then, of course, there are the man's own dying words. ¹⁷⁵And, finally, there was this very important piece of evidence which was found clasped in the dead man's right hand.”

¹⁷⁶From his pocket Stanley Hopkins drew a small paper packet. ¹⁷⁷He unfolded it and disclosed a golden pince-nez, with two broken ends of black silk cord dangling from the end of it. ¹⁷⁸“Willoughby Smith had excellent sight,” he added. ¹⁷⁹“There can be no question that this was snatched from the face or the person of the assassin.”

¹⁸⁰Sherlock Holmes took the glasses into his hand and examined them with the utmost attention and interest. ¹⁸¹He held them on his nose, endeavoured to read through them, went to the window and stared up the street with them, looked at them most minutely in the full light of the lamp, and finally, with a chuckle, seated himself at the table and wrote a few lines upon a sheet of paper, which he tossed across to Stanley Hopkins.

¹⁸²“That's the best I can do for you,” said he. ¹⁸³“It may prove to be of some use.”

¹⁸⁴The astonished detective read the note aloud. ¹⁸⁵It ran as follows:

¹⁸⁶“Wanted, a woman of good address, attired like a lady. ¹⁸⁷She has a remarkably thick nose, with eyes which are set close upon either side of it. ¹⁸⁸She has a puckered forehead, a peering expression, and probably rounded shoulders. ¹⁸⁹There are indications that she has had recourse to an optician at least twice during the last few months. ¹⁹⁰As her glasses are of remarkable strength and as opticians are not very numerous, there should be no difficulty in tracing her.”

¹⁹¹Holmes smiled at the astonishment of Hopkins, which must have been reflected upon my features.

¹⁹²“Surely my deductions are simplicity itself,” said he. ¹⁹³“It would be difficult to name any articles which afford a finer field for inference than a pair of glasses, especially so remarkable a pair as these. ¹⁹⁴That they belong to a woman I infer from their delicacy, and also, of course, from the last words of the dying man. ¹⁹⁵As to her being a person of refinement and well dressed, they are, as you perceive, handsomely mounted in solid gold, and it is inconceivable that anyone who wore such glasses could be slatternly in other respects. ¹⁹⁶You will find that the clips are too wide for your nose, showing that the lady's nose was very broad at the base. ¹⁹⁷This sort of nose is usually a short and coarse one, but there are a sufficient number of exceptions to prevent me from being dogmatic or from insisting upon this point in my description. ¹⁹⁸My own face is a narrow one, and yet I find that I cannot get my eyes into the centre, or near the centre, of these glasses. ¹⁹⁹Therefore the lady's eyes are set very near to the sides of the nose. ²⁰⁰You will perceive, Watson, that the glasses are concave and of unusual strength. ²⁰¹A lady whose vision has been so extremely contracted all her life is sure to have the physical characteristics of such vision, which are seen in the forehead, the eyelids, and the shoulders.”

²⁰²“Yes,” I said, “I can follow each of your arguments. ²⁰³I confess, however, that I am unable to understand how you arrive at the double visit to the optician.”

²⁰⁴Holmes took the glasses in his hand.

²⁰⁵“You will perceive,” he said, “that the clips are lined with tiny bands of cork to soften the pressure upon the nose. ²⁰⁶One of these is discoloured and worn to some slight extent, but the other is new. ²⁰⁷Evidently one has fallen off and been replaced. ²⁰⁸I should judge that the older of them has not been there more than a few months. ²⁰⁹They exactly correspond, so I gather that the lady went back to the same establishment for the second.”

²¹⁰“By George, it's marvellous!” cried Hopkins, in an ecstasy of admiration. ²¹¹“To think that I had all that evidence in my hand and never knew it! ²¹²I had intended, however, to go the round of the London opticians.”

²¹³“Of course you would. ²¹⁴Meanwhile, have you anything more to tell us about the case?”

²¹⁵“Nothing, Mr. Holmes. ²¹⁶I think that you know as much as I do now—probably more. ²¹⁷We have had inquiries made as to any stranger seen on the country roads or at the railway station. ²¹⁸We have heard of none. ²¹⁹What beats me is the utter want of all object in the crime. ²²⁰Not a ghost of a motive can anyone suggest.”

²²¹“Ah! there I am not in a position to help you. ²²²But I suppose you want us to come out to-morrow?”

²²³“If it is not asking too much, Mr. Holmes. ²²⁴There's a train from Charing Cross to Chatham at six in the morning, and we should be at Yoxley Old Place between eight and nine.”

²²⁵“Then we shall take it. ²²⁶Your case has certainly some features of great interest, and I shall be delighted to look into it. ²²⁷Well, it's nearly one, and we had best get a few hours' sleep. ²²⁸I dare say you can manage all right on the sofa in front of the fire. ²²⁹I'll light my spirit-lamp and give you a cup of coffee before we start.”

²³⁰The gale had blown itself out next day, but it was a bitter morning when we started upon our journey. ²³¹We saw the cold winter sun rise over the dreary marshes of the Thames and the long, sullen reaches of the river, which I shall ever associate with our pursuit of the Andaman Islander in the earlier days of our career. ²³²After a long and weary journey we alighted at a small station some miles from Chatham. ²³³While a horse was being put into a trap at the local inn we snatched a hurried breakfast, and so we were all ready for business when we at last arrived at Yoxley Old Place. ²³⁴A constable met us at the garden gate.

²³⁵“Well, Wilson, any news?”

²³⁶“No, sir, nothing.”

²³⁷“No reports of any stranger seen?”

²³⁸“No, sir. ²³⁹Down at the station they are certain that no stranger either came or went yesterday.”

²⁴⁰“Have you had inquiries made at inns and lodgings?”

²⁴¹“Yes, sir; there is no one that we cannot account for.”

²⁴²“Well, it's only a reasonable walk to Chatham. ²⁴³Anyone might stay there, or take a train without being observed. ²⁴⁴This is the garden path of which I spoke, Mr. Holmes. ²⁴⁵I'll pledge my word there was no mark on it yesterday.”

²⁴⁶“On which side were the marks on the grass?”

²⁴⁷“This side, sir. ²⁴⁸This narrow margin of grass between the path and the flower-bed. ²⁴⁹I can't see the traces now, but they were clear to me then.”

²⁵⁰“Yes, yes; someone has passed along,” said Holmes, stooping over the grass border. ²⁵¹“Our lady must have picked her steps carefully, must she not, since on the one side she would leave a track on the path, and on the other an even clearer one on the soft bed?”

²⁵²“Yes, sir, she must have been a cool hand.”

²⁵³I saw an intent look pass over Holmes's face.

²⁵⁴“You say that she must have come back this way?”

²⁵⁵“Yes, sir; there is no other.”

²⁵⁶“On this strip of grass?”

²⁵⁷“Certainly, Mr. Holmes.”

²⁵⁸“Hum! ²⁵⁹It was a very remarkable performance—very remarkable. ²⁶⁰Well, I think we have exhausted the path. ²⁶¹Let us go farther. ²⁶²This garden door is usually kept open, I suppose? ²⁶³Then this visitor had nothing to do but to walk in. ²⁶⁴The idea of murder was not in her mind, or she would have provided herself with some sort of weapon, instead of having to pick this knife off the writing-table. ²⁶⁵She advanced along this corridor, leaving no traces upon the cocoanut matting. ²⁶⁶Then she found herself in this study. ²⁶⁷How long was she there? ²⁶⁸We have no means of judging.”

²⁶⁹“Not more than a few minutes, sir. ²⁷⁰I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Marker, the housekeeper, had been in there tidying not very long before—about a quarter of an hour, she says.”

²⁷¹“Well, that gives us a limit. ²⁷²Our lady enters this room and what does she do? ²⁷³She goes over to the writing-table. ²⁷⁴What for? ²⁷⁵Not for anything in the drawers. ²⁷⁶If there had been anything worth her taking it would surely have been locked up. ²⁷⁷No; it was for something in that wooden bureau. ²⁷⁸Halloa! what is that scratch upon the face of it? ²⁷⁹Just hold a match, Watson. ²⁸⁰Why did you not tell me of this, Hopkins?”

²⁸¹The mark which he was examining began upon the brass work on the right-hand side of the keyhole, and extended for about four inches, where it had scratched the varnish from the surface.

²⁸²“I noticed it, Mr. Holmes. ²⁸³But you'll always find scratches round a keyhole.”

²⁸⁴“This is recent, quite recent. ²⁸⁵See how the brass shines where it is cut. ²⁸⁶An old scratch would be the same colour as the surface. ²⁸⁷Look at it through my lens. ²⁸⁸There's the varnish, too, like earth on each side of a furrow. ²⁸⁹Is Mrs. Marker there?”

²⁹⁰A sad-faced, elderly woman came into the room.

²⁹¹"Did you dust this bureau yesterday morning?"

²⁹²"Yes, sir."

²⁹³"Did you notice this scratch?"

²⁹⁴"No, sir, I did not."

²⁹⁵"I am sure you did not, for a duster would have swept away these shreds of varnish. ²⁹⁶Who has the key of this bureau?"

²⁹⁷"The Professor keeps it on his watch-chain."

²⁹⁸"Is it a simple key?"

²⁹⁹"No, sir; it is a Chubb's key."

³⁰⁰"Very good. ³⁰¹Mrs. Marker, you can go. ³⁰²Now we are making a little progress. ³⁰³Our lady enters the room, advances to the bureau, and either opens it or tries to do so. ³⁰⁴While she is thus engaged young Willoughby Smith enters the room. ³⁰⁵In her hurry to withdraw the key she makes this scratch upon the door. ³⁰⁶He seizes her, and she, snatching up the nearest object, which happens to be this knife, strikes at him in order to make him let go his hold. ³⁰⁷The blow is a fatal one. ³⁰⁸He falls and she escapes, either with or without the object for which she has come. ³⁰⁹Is Susan the maid there? ³¹⁰Could anyone have got away through that door after the time that you heard the cry, Susan?"

³¹¹"No sir; it is impossible. ³¹²Before I got down the stair I'd have seen anyone in the passage. ³¹³Besides, the door never opened, for I would have heard it."

³¹⁴"That settles this exit. ³¹⁵Then no doubt the lady went out the way she came. ³¹⁶I understand that this other passage leads only to the Professor's room. ³¹⁷There is no exit that way?"

³¹⁸"No, sir."

³¹⁹"We shall go down it and make the acquaintance of the Professor. ³²⁰Halloa, Hopkins! this is very important, very important indeed. ³²¹The Professor's corridor is also lined with cocoanut matting."

³²²"Well, sir, what of that?"

³²³"Don't you see any bearing upon the case? ³²⁴Well, well, I don't insist upon it. ³²⁵No doubt I am wrong. ³²⁶And yet it seems to me to be suggestive. ³²⁷Come with me and introduce me."

³²⁸We passed down the passage, which was of the same length as that which led to the garden. ³²⁹At the end was a short flight of steps ending in a door. ³³⁰Our guide knocked, and then ushered us into the Professor's bedroom.

³³¹It was a very large chamber, lined with innumerable volumes, which had overflowed from the shelves and lay in piles in the corners, or were stacked all round at the base of the cases. ³³²The bed was in the centre of the room, and in it, propped up with pillows, was the owner of the house. ³³³I have seldom seen a more remarkable-looking person. ³³⁴It was a gaunt, aquiline face which was turned towards us, with piercing dark eyes, which lurked in deep hollows under overhung and tufted brows. ³³⁵His hair and beard were white, save that the latter was curiously stained with yellow around his mouth. ³³⁶A cigarette glowed amid the tangle of white hair, and the air of the room was fetid with stale tobacco-smoke. ³³⁷As he held out his hand to Holmes I perceived that it also was stained yellow with nicotine.

³³⁸"A smoker, Mr. Holmes?" said he, speaking well-chosen English with a curious little mincing accent.

³³⁹"Pray take a cigarette. ³⁴⁰And you, sir? ³⁴¹I can recommend them, for I have them especially prepared

by Ionides of Alexandria. ³⁴²He sends me a thousand at a time, and I grieve to say that I have to arrange for a fresh supply every fortnight. ³⁴³Bad, sir, very bad, but an old man has few pleasures. ³⁴⁴Tobacco and my work—that is all that is left to me.”

³⁴⁵Holmes had lit a cigarette, and was shooting little darting glances all over the room.

³⁴⁶“Tobacco and my work, but now only tobacco,” the old man exclaimed. ³⁴⁷“Alas! what a fatal interruption! ³⁴⁸Who could have foreseen such a terrible catastrophe? ³⁴⁹So estimable a young man! ³⁵⁰I assure you that after a few months' training he was an admirable assistant. ³⁵¹What do you think of the matter, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁵²“I have not yet made up my mind.”

³⁵³“I shall indeed be indebted to you if you can throw a light where all is so dark to us. ³⁵⁴To a poor bookworm and invalid like myself such a blow is paralyzing. ³⁵⁵I seem to have lost the faculty of thought. ³⁵⁶But you are a man of action—you are a man of affairs. ³⁵⁷It is part of the everyday routine of your life. ³⁵⁸You can preserve your balance in every emergency. ³⁵⁹We are fortunate indeed in having you at our side.”

³⁶⁰Holmes was pacing up and down one side of the room whilst the old Professor was talking. ³⁶¹I observed that he was smoking with extraordinary rapidity. ³⁶²It was evident that he shared our host's liking for the fresh Alexandrian cigarettes.

³⁶³“Yes, sir, it is a crushing blow,” said the old man. ³⁶⁴“That is my magnum opus—the pile of papers on the side table yonder. ³⁶⁵It is my analysis of the documents found in the Coptic monasteries of Syria and Egypt, a work which will cut deep at the very foundations of revealed religion. ³⁶⁶With my enfeebled health I do not know whether I shall ever be able to complete it now that my assistant has been taken from me. ³⁶⁷Dear me, Mr. Holmes; why, you are even a quicker smoker than I am myself.”

³⁶⁸Holmes smiled.

³⁶⁹“I am a connoisseur,” said he, taking another cigarette from the box—his fourth—and lighting it from the stub of that which he had finished. ³⁷⁰“I will not trouble you with any lengthy cross-examination, Professor Coram, since I gather that you were in bed at the time of the crime and could know nothing about it. ³⁷¹I would only ask this. ³⁷²What do you imagine that this poor fellow meant by his last words: ‘The Professor—it was she’?”

³⁷³The Professor shook his head.

³⁷⁴“Susan is a country girl,” said he, “and you know the incredible stupidity of that class. ³⁷⁵I fancy that the poor fellow murmured some incoherent delirious words, and that she twisted them into this meaningless message.”

³⁷⁶“I see. ³⁷⁷You have no explanation yourself of the tragedy?”

³⁷⁸“Possibly an accident; possibly—I only breathe it among ourselves—a suicide. ³⁷⁹Young men have their hidden troubles—some affair of the heart, perhaps, which we have never known. ³⁸⁰It is a more probable supposition than murder.”

³⁸¹“But the eye-glasses?”

³⁸²“Ah! ³⁸³I am only a student—a man of dreams. ³⁸⁴I cannot explain the practical things of life. ³⁸⁵But still, we are aware, my friend, that love-gages may take strange shapes. ³⁸⁶By all means take another cigarette. ³⁸⁷It is a pleasure to see anyone appreciate them so. ³⁸⁸A fan, a glove, glasses—who knows what article may be carried as a token or treasured when a man puts an end to his life? ³⁸⁹This gentleman speaks of footsteps in the grass; but, after all, it is easy to be mistaken on such a point. ³⁹⁰As to the knife,

it might well be thrown far from the unfortunate man as he fell. ³⁹¹It is possible that I speak as a child, but to me it seems that Willoughby Smith has met his fate by his own hand.”

³⁹²Holmes seemed struck by the theory thus put forward, and he continued to walk up and down for some time, lost in thought and consuming cigarette after cigarette.

³⁹³“Tell me, Professor Coram,” he said, at last, “what is in that cupboard in the bureau?”

³⁹⁴“Nothing that would help a thief. ³⁹⁵Family papers, letters from my poor wife, diplomas of Universities which have done me honour. ³⁹⁶Here is the key. ³⁹⁷You can look for yourself.”

³⁹⁸Holmes picked up the key and looked at it for an instant; then he handed it back.

³⁹⁹“No; I hardly think that it would help me,” said he. ⁴⁰⁰“I should prefer to go quietly down to your garden and turn the whole matter over in my head. ⁴⁰¹There is something to be said for the theory of suicide which you have put forward. ⁴⁰²We must apologize for having intruded upon you, Professor Coram, and I promise that we won't disturb you until after lunch. ⁴⁰³At two o'clock we will come again and report to you anything which may have happened in the interval.”

⁴⁰⁴Holmes was curiously distraught, and we walked up and down the garden path for some time in silence.

⁴⁰⁵“Have you a clue?” I asked, at last.

⁴⁰⁶“It depends upon those cigarettes that I smoked,” said he. ⁴⁰⁷“It is possible that I am utterly mistaken. ⁴⁰⁸The cigarettes will show me.”

⁴⁰⁹“My dear Holmes,” I exclaimed, “how on earth—”

⁴¹⁰“Well, well, you may see for yourself. ⁴¹¹If not, there's no harm done. ⁴¹²Of course, we always have the optician's clue to fall back upon, but I take a short cut when I can get it. ⁴¹³Ah, here is the good Mrs. Marker! ⁴¹⁴Let us enjoy five minutes of instructive conversation with her.”

⁴¹⁵I may have remarked before that Holmes had, when he liked, a peculiarly ingratiating way with women, and that he very readily established terms of confidence with them. ⁴¹⁶In half the time which he had named he had captured the housekeeper's goodwill, and was chatting with her as if he had known her for years.

⁴¹⁷“Yes, Mr. Holmes, it is as you say, sir. ⁴¹⁸He does smoke something terrible. ⁴¹⁹All day and sometimes all night, sir. ⁴²⁰I've seen that room of a morning—well, sir, you'd have thought it was a London fog. ⁴²¹Poor young Mr. Smith, he was a smoker also, but not as bad as the Professor. ⁴²²His health—well, I don't know that it's better nor worse for the smoking.”

⁴²³“Ah!” said Holmes, “but it kills the appetite.”

⁴²⁴“Well, I don't know about that, sir.”

⁴²⁵“I suppose the Professor eats hardly anything?”

⁴²⁶“Well, he is variable. ⁴²⁷I'll say that for him.”

⁴²⁸“I'll wager he took no breakfast this morning, and won't face his lunch after all the cigarettes I saw him consume.”

⁴²⁹“Well, you're out there, sir, as it happens, for he ate a remarkable big breakfast this morning. ⁴³⁰I don't know when I've known him make a better one, and he's ordered a good dish of cutlets for his lunch.

⁴³¹I'm surprised myself, for since I came into that room yesterday and saw young Mr. Smith lying there on the floor I couldn't bear to look at food. ⁴³²Well, it takes all sorts to make a world, and the Professor hasn't let it take his appetite away.”

⁴³³We loitered the morning away in the garden. ⁴³⁴Stanley Hopkins had gone down to the village to look into some rumours of a strange woman who had been seen by some children on the Chatham Road the previous morning. ⁴³⁵As to my friend, all his usual energy seemed to have deserted him. ⁴³⁶I had never known him handle a case in such a half-hearted fashion. ⁴³⁷Even the news brought back by Hopkins that he had found the children and that they had undoubtedly seen a woman exactly corresponding with Holmes's description, and wearing either spectacles or eye-glasses, failed to rouse any sign of keen interest. ⁴³⁸He was more attentive when Susan, who waited upon us at lunch, volunteered the information that she believed Mr. Smith had been out for a walk yesterday morning, and that he had only returned half an hour before the tragedy occurred. ⁴³⁹I could not myself see the bearing of this incident, but I clearly perceived that Holmes was weaving it into the general scheme which he had formed in his brain. ⁴⁴⁰Suddenly he sprang from his chair and glanced at his watch. ⁴⁴¹"Two o'clock, gentlemen," said he. ⁴⁴²"We must go up and have it out with our friend the Professor."

⁴⁴³The old man had just finished his lunch, and certainly his empty dish bore evidence to the good appetite with which his housekeeper had credited him. ⁴⁴⁴He was, indeed, a weird figure as he turned his white mane and his glowing eyes towards us. ⁴⁴⁵The eternal cigarette smouldered in his mouth. ⁴⁴⁶He had been dressed and was seated in an arm-chair by the fire.

⁴⁴⁷"Well, Mr. Holmes, have you solved this mystery yet?" ⁴⁴⁸He shoved the large tin of cigarettes which stood on a table beside him towards my companion. ⁴⁴⁹Holmes stretched out his hand at the same moment, and between them they tipped the box over the edge. ⁴⁵⁰For a minute or two we were all on our knees retrieving stray cigarettes from impossible places. ⁴⁵¹When we rose again I observed that Holmes's eyes were shining and his cheeks tinged with colour. ⁴⁵²Only at a crisis have I seen those battle-signals flying.

⁴⁵³"Yes," said he, "I have solved it."

⁴⁵⁴Stanley Hopkins and I stared in amazement. ⁴⁵⁵Something like a sneer quivered over the gaunt features of the old Professor.

⁴⁵⁶"Indeed! ⁴⁵⁷In the garden?"

⁴⁵⁸"No, here."

⁴⁵⁹"Here! ⁴⁶⁰When?"

⁴⁶¹"This instant."

⁴⁶²"You are surely joking, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ⁴⁶³You compel me to tell you that this is too serious a matter to be treated in such a fashion."

⁴⁶⁴"I have forged and tested every link of my chain, Professor Coram, and I am sure that it is sound.

⁴⁶⁵What your motives are or what exact part you play in this strange business I am not yet able to say.

⁴⁶⁶In a few minutes I shall probably hear it from your own lips. ⁴⁶⁷Meanwhile I will reconstruct what is past for your benefit, so that you may know the information which I still require.

⁴⁶⁸"A lady yesterday entered your study. ⁴⁶⁹She came with the intention of possessing herself of certain documents which were in your bureau. ⁴⁷⁰She had a key of her own. ⁴⁷¹I have had an opportunity of examining yours, and I do not find that slight discolouration which the scratch made upon the varnish would have produced. ⁴⁷²You were not an accessory, therefore, and she came, so far as I can read the evidence, without your knowledge to rob you."

⁴⁷³The Professor blew a cloud from his lips. ⁴⁷⁴"This is most interesting and instructive," said he.

⁴⁷⁵"Have you no more to add? ⁴⁷⁶Surely, having traced this lady so far, you can also say what has become of her."

⁴⁷⁷“I will endeavour to do so. ⁴⁷⁸In the first place she was seized by your secretary, and stabbed him in order to escape. ⁴⁷⁹This catastrophe I am inclined to regard as an unhappy accident, for I am convinced that the lady had no intention of inflicting so grievous an injury. ⁴⁸⁰An assassin does not come unarmed. ⁴⁸¹Horried by what she had done she rushed wildly away from the scene of the tragedy. ⁴⁸²Unfortunately for her she had lost her glasses in the scuffle, and as she was extremely short-sighted she was really helpless without them. ⁴⁸³She ran down a corridor, which she imagined to be that by which she had come—both were lined with cocoanut matting—and it was only when it was too late that she understood that she had taken the wrong passage and that her retreat was cut off behind her. ⁴⁸⁴What was she to do? ⁴⁸⁵She could not go back. ⁴⁸⁶She could not remain where she was. ⁴⁸⁷She must go on. ⁴⁸⁸She went on. ⁴⁸⁹She mounted a stair, pushed open a door, and found herself in your room.”

⁴⁹⁰The old man sat with his mouth open staring wildly at Holmes. ⁴⁹¹Amazement and fear were stamped upon his expressive features. ⁴⁹²Now, with an effort, he shrugged his shoulders and burst into insincere laughter.

⁴⁹³“All very fine, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ⁴⁹⁴“But there is one little flaw in your splendid theory. ⁴⁹⁵I was myself in my room, and I never left it during the day.”

⁴⁹⁶“I am aware of that, Professor Coram.”

⁴⁹⁷“And you mean to say that I could lie upon that bed and not be aware that a woman had entered my room?”

⁴⁹⁸“I never said so. ⁴⁹⁹You were aware of it. ⁵⁰⁰You spoke with her. ⁵⁰¹You recognised her. ⁵⁰²You aided her to escape.”

⁵⁰³Again the Professor burst into high-keyed laughter. ⁵⁰⁴He had risen to his feet and his eyes glowed like embers.

⁵⁰⁵“You are mad!” he cried. ⁵⁰⁶“You are talking insanely. ⁵⁰⁷I helped her to escape? ⁵⁰⁸Where is she now?”

⁵⁰⁹“She is there,” said Holmes, and he pointed to a high bookcase in the corner of the room.

⁵¹⁰I saw the old man throw up his arms, a terrible convulsion passed over his grim face, and he fell back in his chair. ⁵¹¹At the same instant the bookcase at which Holmes pointed swung round upon a hinge, and a woman rushed out into the room. ⁵¹²“You are right!” she cried, in a strange foreign voice. ⁵¹³“You are right! ⁵¹⁴I am here.”

⁵¹⁵She was brown with the dust and draped with the cobwebs which had come from the walls of her hiding-place. ⁵¹⁶Her face, too, was streaked with grime, and at the best she could never have been handsome, for she had the exact physical characteristics which Holmes had divined, with, in addition, a long and obstinate chin. ⁵¹⁷What with her natural blindness, and what with the change from dark to light, she stood as one dazed, blinking about her to see where and who we were. ⁵¹⁸And yet, in spite of all these disadvantages, there was a certain nobility in the woman's bearing, a gallantry in the defiant chin and in the upraised head, which compelled something of respect and admiration. ⁵¹⁹Stanley Hopkins had laid his hand upon her arm and claimed her as his prisoner, but she waved him aside gently, and yet with an overmastering dignity which compelled obedience. ⁵²⁰The old man lay back in his chair, with a twitching face, and stared at her with brooding eyes.

⁵²¹“Yes, sir, I am your prisoner,” she said. ⁵²²“From where I stood I could hear everything, and I know that you have learned the truth. ⁵²³I confess it all. ⁵²⁴It was I who killed the young man. ⁵²⁵But you are right, you who say it was an accident. ⁵²⁶I did not even know that it was a knife which I held in my hand, for in my despair I snatched anything from the table and struck at him to make him let me go. ⁵²⁷It is the truth that I tell.”

⁵²⁸“Madam,” said Holmes, “I am sure that it is the truth. ⁵²⁹I fear that you are far from well.”

⁵³⁰She had turned a dreadful colour, the more ghastly under the dark dust-streaks upon her face. ⁵³¹She seated herself on the side of the bed; then she resumed.

⁵³²“I have only a little time here,” she said, “but I would have you to know the whole truth. ⁵³³I am this man's wife. ⁵³⁴He is not an Englishman. ⁵³⁵He is a Russian. ⁵³⁶His name I will not tell.”

⁵³⁷For the first time the old man stirred. ⁵³⁸“God bless you, Anna!” he cried. ⁵³⁹“God bless you!”

⁵⁴⁰She cast a look of the deepest disdain in his direction. ⁵⁴¹“Why should you cling so hard to that wretched life of yours, Sergius?” said she. ⁵⁴²“It has done harm to many and good to none—not even to yourself. ⁵⁴³However, it is not for me to cause the frail thread to be snapped before God's time. ⁵⁴⁴I have enough already upon my soul since I crossed the threshold of this cursed house. ⁵⁴⁵But I must speak or I shall be too late.

⁵⁴⁶“I have said, gentlemen, that I am this man's wife. ⁵⁴⁷He was fifty and I a foolish girl of twenty when we married. ⁵⁴⁸It was in a city of Russia, a University— ⁵⁴⁹I will not name the place.”

⁵⁵⁰“God bless you, Anna!” murmured the old man again.

⁵⁵¹“We were reformers—revolutionists—Nihilists, you understand. ⁵⁵²He and I and many more. ⁵⁵³Then there came a time of trouble, a police officer was killed, many were arrested, evidence was wanted, and in order to save his own life and to earn a great reward my husband betrayed his own wife and his companions. ⁵⁵⁴Yes, we were all arrested upon his confession. ⁵⁵⁵Some of us found our way to the gallows and some to Siberia. ⁵⁵⁶I was among these last, but my term was not for life. ⁵⁵⁷My husband came to England with his ill-gotten gains, and has lived in quiet ever since, knowing well that if the Brotherhood knew where he was not a week would pass before justice would be done.”

⁵⁵⁸The old man reached out a trembling hand and helped himself to a cigarette. ⁵⁵⁹“I am in your hands, Anna,” said he. ⁵⁶⁰“You were always good to me.”

⁵⁶¹“I have not yet told you the height of his villainy,” said she. ⁵⁶²“Among our comrades of the Order there was one who was the friend of my heart. ⁵⁶³He was noble, unselfish, loving—all that my husband was not. ⁵⁶⁴He hated violence. ⁵⁶⁵We were all guilty—if that is guilt—but he was not. ⁵⁶⁶He wrote for ever dissuading us from such a course. ⁵⁶⁷These letters would have saved him. ⁵⁶⁸So would my diary, in which from day to day I had entered both my feelings towards him and the view which each of us had taken. ⁵⁶⁹My husband found and kept both diary and letters. ⁵⁷⁰He hid them, and he tried hard to swear away the young man's life. ⁵⁷¹In this he failed, but Alexis was sent a convict to Siberia, where now, at this moment, he works in a salt mine. ⁵⁷²Think of that, you villain, you villain; now, now, at this very moment, Alexis, a man whose name you are not worthy to speak, works and lives like a slave, and yet I have your life in my hands and I let you go.”

⁵⁷³“You were always a noble woman, Anna,” said the old man, puffing at his cigarette.

⁵⁷⁴She had risen, but she fell back again with a little cry of pain.

⁵⁷⁵“I must finish,” she said. ⁵⁷⁶“When my term was over I set myself to get the diary and letters which, if sent to the Russian Government, would procure my friend's release. ⁵⁷⁷I knew that my husband had come to England. ⁵⁷⁸After months of searching I discovered where he was. ⁵⁷⁹I knew that he still had the diary, for when I was in Siberia I had a letter from him once reproaching me and quoting some passages from its pages. ⁵⁸⁰Yet I was sure that with his revengeful nature he would never give it to me of his own free will. ⁵⁸¹I must get it for myself. ⁵⁸²With this object I engaged an agent from a private detective firm, who entered my husband's house as secretary—it was your second secretary, Sergius, the one who left you so hurriedly. ⁵⁸³He found that papers were kept in the cupboard, and he got an impression of the key. ⁵⁸⁴He would not go farther. ⁵⁸⁵He furnished me with a plan of the house, and he

told me that in the forenoon the study was always empty, as the secretary was employed up here. ⁵⁸⁶So at last I took my courage in both hands and I came down to get the papers for myself. ⁵⁸⁷I succeeded, but at what a cost!

⁵⁸⁸“I had just taken the papers and was locking the cupboard when the young man seized me. ⁵⁸⁹I had seen him already that morning. ⁵⁹⁰He had met me in the road and I had asked him to tell me where Professor Coram lived, not knowing that he was in his employ.”

⁵⁹¹“Exactly! exactly!” said Holmes. ⁵⁹²“The secretary came back and told his employer of the woman he had met. ⁵⁹³Then in his last breath he tried to send a message that it was she—the she whom he had just discussed with him.”

⁵⁹⁴“You must let me speak,” said the woman, in an imperative voice, and her face contracted as if in pain. ⁵⁹⁵“When he had fallen I rushed from the room, chose the wrong door, and found myself in my husband's room. ⁵⁹⁶He spoke of giving me up. ⁵⁹⁷I showed him that if he did so his life was in my hands. ⁵⁹⁸If he gave me to the law I could give him to the Brotherhood. ⁵⁹⁹It was not that I wished to live for my own sake, but it was that I desired to accomplish my purpose. ⁶⁰⁰He knew that I would do what I said—that his own fate was involved in mine. ⁶⁰¹For that reason and for no other he shielded me. ⁶⁰²He thrust me into that dark hiding-place, a relic of old days, known only to himself. ⁶⁰³He took his meals in his own room, and so was able to give me part of his food. ⁶⁰⁴It was agreed that when the police left the house I should slip away by night and come back no more. ⁶⁰⁵But in some way you have read our plans.” ⁶⁰⁶She tore from the bosom of her dress a small packet. ⁶⁰⁷“These are my last words,” said she; “here is the packet which will save Alexis. ⁶⁰⁸I confide it to your honour and to your love of justice. ⁶⁰⁹Take it! ⁶¹⁰You will deliver it at the Russian Embassy. ⁶¹¹Now I have done my duty, and—”

⁶¹²“Stop her!” cried Holmes. ⁶¹³He had bounded across the room and had wrenched a small phial from her hand.

⁶¹⁴“Too late!” she said, sinking back on the bed. ⁶¹⁵“Too late! ⁶¹⁶I took the poison before I left my hiding-place. ⁶¹⁷My head swims! ⁶¹⁸I am going! ⁶¹⁹I charge you, sir, to remember the packet.”

⁶²⁰“A simple case, and yet in some ways an instructive one,” Holmes remarked, as we travelled back to town. ⁶²¹“It hinged from the outset upon the pince-nez. ⁶²²But for the fortunate chance of the dying man having seized these I am not sure that we could ever have reached our solution. ⁶²³It was clear to me from the strength of the glasses that the wearer must have been very blind and helpless when deprived of them. ⁶²⁴When you asked me to believe that she walked along a narrow strip of grass without once making a false step I remarked, as you may remember, that it was a noteworthy performance. ⁶²⁵In my mind I set it down as an impossible performance, save in the unlikely case that she had a second pair of glasses. ⁶²⁶I was forced, therefore, to seriously consider the hypothesis that she had remained within the house. ⁶²⁷On perceiving the similarity of the two corridors it became clear that she might very easily have made such a mistake, and in that case it was evident that she must have entered the Professor's room. ⁶²⁸I was keenly on the alert, therefore, for whatever would bear out this supposition, and I examined the room narrowly for anything in the shape of a hiding-place. ⁶²⁹The carpet seemed continuous and firmly nailed, so I dismissed the idea of a trap-door. ⁶³⁰There might well be a recess behind the books. ⁶³¹As you are aware, such devices are common in old libraries. ⁶³²I observed that books were piled on the floor at all other points, but that one bookcase was left clear. ⁶³³This, then, might be the door. ⁶³⁴I could see no marks to guide me, but the carpet was of a dun colour, which lends itself very well to examination. ⁶³⁵I therefore smoked a great number of those excellent cigarettes, and I dropped the ash all over the space in front of the suspected bookcase. ⁶³⁶It was a simple trick, but exceedingly effective. ⁶³⁷I then went downstairs and I ascertained, in your presence, Watson, without your perceiving the drift of my remarks, that Professor Coram's consumption of food had increased—as one would expect when he is supplying a second person. ⁶³⁸We then ascended to the room again, when, by upsetting the cigarette-box, I obtained a very excellent view of the floor, and was able to see

quite clearly, from the traces upon the cigarette ash, that the prisoner had, in our absence, come out from her retreat. ⁶³⁹Well, Hopkins, here we are at Charing Cross, and I congratulate you on having brought your case to a successful conclusion. ⁶⁴⁰You are going to head-quarters, no doubt. I think, Watson, you and I will drive together to the Russian Embassy.”

The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter

¹We were fairly accustomed to receive weird telegrams at Baker Street, but I have a particular recollection of one which reached us on a gloomy February morning some seven or eight years ago and gave Mr. Sherlock Holmes a puzzled quarter of an hour. ²It was addressed to him, and ran thus:

³“Please await me. ⁴Terrible misfortune. ⁵Right wing three-quarter missing; indispensable to-morrow.

⁶— Overton.”

⁷“Strand post-mark and dispatched ten-thirty-six,” said Holmes, reading it over and over. ⁸“Mr. Overton was evidently considerably excited when he sent it, and somewhat incoherent in consequence. ⁹Well, well, he will be here, I dare say, by the time I have looked through the times, and then we shall know all about it. ¹⁰Even the most insignificant problem would be welcome in these stagnant days.”

¹¹Things had indeed been very slow with us, and I had learned to dread such periods of inaction, for I knew by experience that my companion's brain was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material upon which to work. ¹²For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career. ¹³Now I knew that under ordinary conditions he no longer craved for this artificial stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead, but sleeping; and I have known that the sleep was a light one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes's ascetic face, and the brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes. ¹⁴Therefore I blessed this Mr. Overton, whoever he might be, since he had come with his enigmatic message to break that dangerous calm which brought more peril to my friend than all the storms of his tempestuous life.

¹⁵As we had expected, the telegram was soon followed by its sender, and the card of Mr. Cyril Overton, of Trinity College, Cambridge, announced the arrival of an enormous young man, sixteen stone of solid bone and muscle, who spanned the doorway with his broad shoulders and looked from one of us to the other with a comely face which was haggard with anxiety.

¹⁶“Mr. Sherlock Holmes?”

¹⁷My companion bowed.

¹⁸“I've been down to Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁹I saw Inspector Stanley Hopkins. ²⁰He advised me to come to you. ²¹He said the case, so far as he could see, was more in your line than in that of the regular police.”

²²“Pray sit down and tell me what is the matter.”

²³“It's awful, Mr. Holmes, simply awful! ²⁴I wonder my hair isn't grey. ²⁵Godfrey Staunton—you've heard of him, of course? ²⁶He's simply the hinge that the whole team turns on. ²⁷I'd rather spare two from the pack and have Godfrey for my three-quarter line. ²⁸Whether it's passing, or tackling, or dribbling, there's no one to touch him; and then, he's got the head and can hold us all together. ²⁹What am I to do? ³⁰That's what I ask you, Mr. Holmes. ³¹There's Moorhouse, first reserve, but he is trained as a half, and he always edges right in on to the scrum instead of keeping out on the touch-line. ³²He's a fine place-kick, it's true, but, then, he has no judgment, and he can't sprint for nuts. ³³Why, Morton or Johnson, the Oxford fliers, could romp round him. ³⁴Stevenson is fast enough, but he couldn't drop from the twenty-five line, and a three-quarter who can't either punt or drop isn't worth a place for pace alone. ³⁵No, Mr. Holmes, we are done unless you can help me to find Godfrey Staunton.”

³⁶My friend had listened with amused surprise to this long speech, which was poured forth with extraordinary vigour and earnestness, every point being driven home by the slapping of a brawny hand

upon the speaker's knee. ³⁷When our visitor was silent Holmes stretched out his hand and took down letter "S" of his commonplace book. ³⁸For once he dug in vain into that mine of varied information.

³⁹"There is Arthur H. Staunton, the rising young forger," said he, "and there was Henry Staunton, whom I helped to hang, but Godfrey Staunton is a new name to me."

⁴⁰It was our visitor's turn to look surprised.

⁴¹"Why, Mr. Holmes, I thought you knew things," said he. ⁴²"I suppose, then, if you have never heard of Godfrey Staunton you don't know Cyril Overton either?"

⁴³Holmes shook his head good-humouredly.

⁴⁴"Great Scot!" cried the athlete. ⁴⁵"Why, I was first reserve for England against Wales, and I've skippered the 'Varsity all this year. ⁴⁶But that's nothing! ⁴⁷I didn't think there was a soul in England who didn't know Godfrey Staunton, the crack three-quarter, Cambridge, Blackheath, and five Internationals. ⁴⁸Good Lord! ⁴⁹Mr. Holmes, where have you lived?"

⁵⁰Holmes laughed at the young giant's naive astonishment.

⁵¹"You live in a different world to me, Mr. Overton, a sweeter and healthier one. ⁵²My ramifications stretch out into many sections of society, but never, I am happy to say, into amateur sport, which is the best and soundest thing in England. ⁵³However, your unexpected visit this morning shows me that even in that world of fresh air and fair play there may be work for me to do; so now, my good sir, I beg you to sit down and to tell me slowly and quietly exactly what it is that has occurred, and how you desire that I should help you."

⁵⁴Young Overton's face assumed the bothered look of the man who is more accustomed to using his muscles than his wits; but by degrees, with many repetitions and obscurities which I may omit from his narrative, he laid his strange story before us.

⁵⁵"It's this way, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁶As I have said, I am the skipper of the Rugger team of Cambridge 'Varsity, and Godfrey Staunton is my best man. ⁵⁷To-morrow we play Oxford. ⁵⁸Yesterday we all came up and we settled at Bentley's private hotel. ⁵⁹At ten o'clock I went round and saw that all the fellows had gone to roost, for I believe in strict training and plenty of sleep to keep a team fit. ⁶⁰I had a word or two with Godfrey before he turned in. ⁶¹He seemed to me to be pale and bothered. ⁶²I asked him what was the matter. ⁶³He said he was all right—just a touch of headache. ⁶⁴I bade him good-night and left him. ⁶⁵Half an hour later the porter tells me that a rough-looking man with a beard called with a note for Godfrey. ⁶⁶He had not gone to bed and the note was taken to his room. ⁶⁷Godfrey read it and fell back in a chair as if he had been pole-axed. ⁶⁸The porter was so scared that he was going to fetch me, but Godfrey stopped him, had a drink of water, and pulled himself together. ⁶⁹Then he went downstairs, said a few words to the man who was waiting in the hall, and the two of them went off together. ⁷⁰The last that the porter saw of them, they were almost running down the street in the direction of the Strand. ⁷¹This morning Godfrey's room was empty, his bed had never been slept in, and his things were all just as I had seen them the night before. ⁷²He had gone off at a moment's notice with this stranger, and no word has come from him since. ⁷³I don't believe he will ever come back. ⁷⁴He was a sportsman, was Godfrey, down to his marrow, and he wouldn't have stopped his training and let in his skipper if it were not for some cause that was too strong for him. ⁷⁵No; I feel as if he were gone for good and we should never see him again."

⁷⁶Sherlock Holmes listened with the deepest attention to this singular narrative.

⁷⁷"What did you do?" he asked.

⁷⁸"I wired to Cambridge to learn if anything had been heard of him there. ⁷⁹I have had an answer. ⁸⁰No one has seen him."

⁸¹“Could he have got back to Cambridge?”

⁸²“Yes, there is a late train—quarter-past eleven.”

⁸³“But so far as you can ascertain he did not take it?”

⁸⁴“No, he has not been seen.”

⁸⁵“What did you do next?”

⁸⁶“I wired to Lord Mount-James.”

⁸⁷“Why to Lord Mount-James?”

⁸⁸“Godfrey is an orphan, and Lord Mount-James is his nearest relative—his uncle, I believe.”

⁸⁹“Indeed. ⁹⁰This throws new light upon the matter. ⁹¹Lord Mount-James is one of the richest men in England.”

⁹²“So I've heard Godfrey say.”

⁹³“And your friend was closely related?”

⁹⁴“Yes, he was his heir, and the old boy is nearly eighty—cram full of gout, too. ⁹⁵They say he could chalk his billiard-cue with his knuckles. ⁹⁶He never allowed Godfrey a shilling in his life, for he is an absolute miser, but it will all come to him right enough.”

⁹⁷“Have you heard from Lord Mount-James?”

⁹⁸“No.”

⁹⁹“What motive could your friend have in going to Lord Mount-James?”

¹⁰⁰“Well, something was worrying him the night before, and if it was to do with money it is possible that he would make for his nearest relative who had so much of it, though from all I have heard he would not have much chance of getting it. ¹⁰¹Godfrey was not fond of the old man. ¹⁰²He would not go if he could help it.”

¹⁰³“Well, we can soon determine that. ¹⁰⁴If your friend was going to his relative, Lord Mount-James, you have then to explain the visit of this rough-looking fellow at so late an hour, and the agitation that was caused by his coming.”

¹⁰⁵Cyril Overton pressed his hands to his head. ¹⁰⁶“I can make nothing of it,” said he.

¹⁰⁷“Well, well, I have a clear day, and I shall be happy to look into the matter,” said Holmes. ¹⁰⁸“I should strongly recommend you to make your preparations for your match without reference to this young gentleman. ¹⁰⁹It must, as you say, have been an overpowering necessity which tore him away in such a fashion, and the same necessity is likely to hold him away. ¹¹⁰Let us step round together to this hotel, and see if the porter can throw any fresh light upon the matter.”

¹¹¹Sherlock Holmes was a past-master in the art of putting a humble witness at his ease, and very soon, in the privacy of Godfrey Staunton's abandoned room, he had extracted all that the porter had to tell.

¹¹²The visitor of the night before was not a gentleman, neither was he a working man. ¹¹³He was simply what the porter described as a “medium-looking chap”; a man of fifty, beard grizzled, pale face, quietly dressed. ¹¹⁴He seemed himself to be agitated. ¹¹⁵The porter had observed his hand trembling when he had held out the note. ¹¹⁶Godfrey Staunton had crammed the note into his pocket. ¹¹⁷Staunton had not shaken hands with the man in the hall. ¹¹⁸They had exchanged a few sentences, of which the porter had only distinguished the one word “time.” ¹¹⁹Then they had hurried off in the manner described. ¹²⁰It was just half-past ten by the hall clock.

¹²¹“Let me see,” said Holmes, seating himself on Staunton's bed. ¹²²“You are the day porter, are you not?”

¹²³“Yes, sir; I go off duty at eleven.”

¹²⁴“The night porter saw nothing, I suppose?”

¹²⁵“No, sir; one theatre party came in late. ¹²⁶No one else.”

¹²⁷“Were you on duty all day yesterday?”

¹²⁸“Yes, sir.”

¹²⁹“Did you take any messages to Mr. Staunton?”

¹³⁰“Yes, sir; one telegram.”

¹³¹“Ah! that's interesting. ¹³²What o'clock was this?”

¹³³“About six.”

¹³⁴“Where was Mr. Staunton when he received it?”

¹³⁵“Here in his room.”

¹³⁶“Were you present when he opened it?”

¹³⁷“Yes, sir; I waited to see if there was an answer.”

¹³⁸“Well, was there?”

¹³⁹“Yes, sir. ¹⁴⁰He wrote an answer.”

¹⁴¹“Did you take it?”

¹⁴²“No; he took it himself.”

¹⁴³“But he wrote it in your presence?”

¹⁴⁴“Yes, sir. I was standing by the door, and he with his back turned at that table. ¹⁴⁵When he had written it he said, ‘All right, porter, I will take this myself.’”

¹⁴⁶“What did he write it with?”

¹⁴⁷“A pen, sir.”

¹⁴⁸“Was the telegraphic form one of these on the table?”

¹⁴⁹“Yes, sir; it was the top one.”

¹⁵⁰Holmes rose. ¹⁵¹Taking the forms he carried them over to the window and carefully examined that which was uppermost.

¹⁵²“It is a pity he did not write in pencil,” said he, throwing them down again with a shrug of disappointment. ¹⁵³“As you have no doubt frequently observed, Watson, the impression usually goes through—a fact which has dissolved many a happy marriage. ¹⁵⁴However, I can find no trace here. ¹⁵⁵I rejoice, however, to perceive that he wrote with a broad-pointed quill pen, and I can hardly doubt that we will find some impression upon this blotting-pad. ¹⁵⁶Ah, yes, surely this is the very thing!”

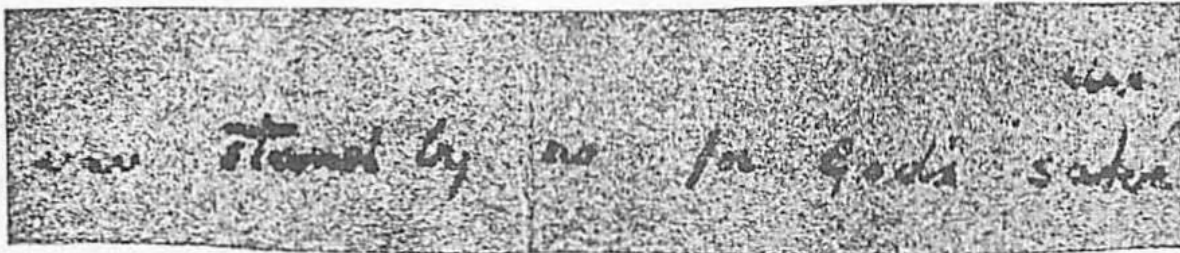
¹⁵⁷He tore off a strip of the blotting-paper and turned towards us the following hieroglyphic:



¹⁵⁸Cyril Overton was much excited. ¹⁵⁹"Hold it to the glass!" he cried.

¹⁶⁰"That is unnecessary," said Holmes. ¹⁶¹"The paper is thin, and the reverse will give the message.

¹⁶²Here it is." ¹⁶³He turned it over and we read:



¹⁶⁴[Stand by us for God's sake!]

¹⁶⁵"So that is the tail end of the telegram which Godfrey Staunton dispatched within a few hours of his disappearance. ¹⁶⁶There are at least six words of the message which have escaped us; but what remains—"Stand by us for God's sake!"—proves that this young man saw a formidable danger which approached him, and from which someone else could protect him. ¹⁶⁷'Us,' mark you! ¹⁶⁸Another person was involved. ¹⁶⁹Who should it be but the pale-faced, bearded man, who seemed himself in so nervous a state? ¹⁷⁰What, then, is the connection between Godfrey Staunton and the bearded man? ¹⁷¹And what is the third source from which each of them sought for help against pressing danger? ¹⁷²Our inquiry has already narrowed down to that."

¹⁷³"We have only to find to whom that telegram is addressed," I suggested.

¹⁷⁴"Exactly, my dear Watson. ¹⁷⁵Your reflection, though profound, had already crossed my mind. ¹⁷⁶But I dare say it may have come to your notice that if you walk into a post-office and demand to see the counterfoil of another man's message there may be some disinclination on the part of the officials to oblige you. ¹⁷⁷There is so much red tape in these matters! ¹⁷⁸However, I have no doubt that with a little delicacy and finesse the end may be attained. ¹⁷⁹Meanwhile, I should like in your presence, Mr. Overton, to go through these papers which have been left upon the table."

¹⁸⁰There were a number of letters, bills, and note-books, which Holmes turned over and examined with quick, nervous fingers and darting, penetrating eyes. ¹⁸¹"Nothing here," he said, at last. ¹⁸²"By the way, I suppose your friend was a healthy young fellow—nothing amiss with him?"

¹⁸³"Sound as a bell."

¹⁸⁴"Have you ever known him ill?"

¹⁸⁵"Not a day. ¹⁸⁶He has been laid up with a hack, and once he slipped his knee-cap, but that was nothing."

¹⁸⁷"Perhaps he was not so strong as you suppose. ¹⁸⁸I should think he may have had some secret trouble. ¹⁸⁹With your assent I will put one or two of these papers in my pocket, in case they should bear upon our future inquiry."

¹⁹⁰“One moment! one moment!” cried a querulous voice, and we looked up to find a queer little old man, jerking and twitching in the doorway. ¹⁹¹He was dressed in rusty black, with a very broad brimmed top-hat and a loose white necktie—the whole effect being that of a very rustic parson or of an undertaker's mute. ¹⁹²Yet, in spite of his shabby and even absurd appearance, his voice had a sharp crackle, and his manner a quick intensity which commanded attention.

¹⁹³“Who are you, sir, and by what right do you touch this gentleman's papers?” he asked.

¹⁹⁴“I am a private detective, and I am endeavouring to explain his disappearance.”

¹⁹⁵“Oh, you are, are you? ¹⁹⁶And who instructed you, eh?”

¹⁹⁷“This gentleman, Mr. Staunton's friend, was referred to me by Scotland Yard.”

¹⁹⁸“Who are you, sir?”

¹⁹⁹“I am Cyril Overton.”

²⁰⁰“Then it is you who sent me a telegram. ²⁰¹My name is Lord Mount-James. ²⁰²I came round as quickly as the Bayswater 'bus would bring me. ²⁰³So you have instructed a detective?”

²⁰⁴“Yes, sir.”

²⁰⁵“And are you prepared to meet the cost?”

²⁰⁶“I have no doubt, sir, that my friend Godfrey, when we find him, will be prepared to do that.”

²⁰⁷“But if he is never found, eh? ²⁰⁸Answer me that!”

²⁰⁹“In that case no doubt his family—”

²¹⁰“Nothing of the sort, sir!” screamed the little man. ²¹¹“Don't look to me for a penny—not a penny! ²¹²You understand that, Mr. Detective! ²¹³I am all the family that this young man has got, and I tell you that I am not responsible. ²¹⁴If he has any expectations it is due to the fact that I have never wasted money, and I do not propose to begin to do so now. ²¹⁵As to those papers with which you are making so free, I may tell you that in case there should be anything of any value among them you will be held strictly to account for what you do with them.”

²¹⁶“Very good, sir,” said Sherlock Holmes. ²¹⁷“May I ask in the meanwhile whether you have yourself any theory to account for this young man's disappearance?”

²¹⁸“No, sir, I have not. ²¹⁹He is big enough and old enough to look after himself, and if he is so foolish as to lose himself I entirely refuse to accept the responsibility of hunting for him.”

²²⁰“I quite understand your position,” said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. ²²¹“Perhaps you don't quite understand mine. ²²²Godfrey Staunton appears to have been a poor man. ²²³If he has been kidnapped it could not have been for anything which he himself possesses. ²²⁴The fame of your wealth has gone abroad, Lord Mount-James, and it is entirely possible that a gang of thieves have secured your nephew in order to gain from him some information as to your house, your habits, and your treasure.”

²²⁵The face of our unpleasant little visitor turned as white as his neckcloth.

²²⁶“Heavens, sir, what an idea! ²²⁷I never thought of such villainy! ²²⁸What inhuman rogues there are in the world! ²²⁹But Godfrey is a fine lad—a staunch lad. ²³⁰Nothing would induce him to give his old uncle away. ²³¹I'll have the plate moved over to the bank this evening. ²³²In the meantime spare no pains, Mr. Detective! ²³³I beg you to leave no stone unturned to bring him safely back. ²³⁴As to money, well, so far as a fiver, or even a tenner, goes, you can always look to me.”

²³⁵Even in his chastened frame of mind the noble miser could give us no information which could help us, for he knew little of the private life of his nephew. ²³⁶Our only clue lay in the truncated telegram, and with a copy of this in his hand Holmes set forth to find a second link for his chain. ²³⁷We had shaken off Lord Mount-James, and Overton had gone to consult with the other members of his team over the misfortune which had befallen them.

²³⁸There was a telegraph-office at a short distance from the hotel. ²³⁹We halted outside it.

²⁴⁰"It's worth trying, Watson," said Holmes. ²⁴¹"Of course, with a warrant we could demand to see the counterfoils, but we have not reached that stage yet. ²⁴²I don't suppose they remember faces in so busy a place. ²⁴³Let us venture it."

²⁴⁴"I am sorry to trouble you," said he, in his blandest manner, to the young woman behind the grating; "there is some small mistake about a telegram I sent yesterday. ²⁴⁵I have had no answer, and I very much fear that I must have omitted to put my name at the end. ²⁴⁶Could you tell me if this was so?"

²⁴⁷The young woman turned over a sheaf of counterfoils.

²⁴⁸"What o'clock was it?" she asked.

²⁴⁹"A little after six."

²⁵⁰"Whom was it to?"

²⁵¹Holmes put his finger to his lips and glanced at me. ²⁵²"The last words in it were 'for God's sake,'" he whispered, confidentially; "I am very anxious at getting no answer."

²⁵³The young woman separated one of the forms.

²⁵⁴"This is it. ²⁵⁵There is no name," said she, smoothing it out upon the counter.

²⁵⁶"Then that, of course, accounts for my getting no answer," said Holmes. ²⁵⁷"Dear me, how very stupid of me, to be sure! ²⁵⁸Good morning, miss, and many thanks for having relieved my mind." ²⁵⁹He chuckled and rubbed his hands when we found ourselves in the street once more.

²⁶⁰"Well?" I asked.

²⁶¹"We progress, my dear Watson, we progress. ²⁶²I had seven different schemes for getting a glimpse of that telegram, but I could hardly hope to succeed the very first time."

²⁶³"And what have you gained?"

²⁶⁴"A starting-point for our investigation." ²⁶⁵He hailed a cab. ²⁶⁶"King's Cross Station," said he.

²⁶⁷"We have a journey, then?"

²⁶⁸"Yes; I think we must run down to Cambridge together. ²⁶⁹All the indications seem to me to point in that direction."

²⁷⁰"Tell me," I asked, as we rattled up Gray's Inn Road, "have you any suspicion yet as to the cause of the disappearance? ²⁷¹I don't think that among all our cases I have known one where the motives are more obscure. ²⁷²Surely you don't really imagine that he may be kidnapped in order to give information against his wealthy uncle?"

²⁷³"I confess, my dear Watson, that that does not appeal to me as a very probable explanation. ²⁷⁴It struck me, however, as being the one which was most likely to interest that exceedingly unpleasant old person."

²⁷⁵"It certainly did that. ²⁷⁶But what are your alternatives?"

²⁷⁷“I could mention several. ²⁷⁸You must admit that it is curious and suggestive that this incident should occur on the eve of this important match, and should involve the only man whose presence seems essential to the success of the side. ²⁷⁹It may, of course, be coincidence, but it is interesting. ²⁸⁰Amateur sport is free from betting, but a good deal of outside betting goes on among the public, and it is possible that it might be worth someone's while to get at a player as the ruffians of the turf get at a race-horse. ²⁸¹There is one explanation. ²⁸²A second very obvious one is that this young man really is the heir of a great property, however modest his means may at present be, and it is not impossible that a plot to hold him for ransom might be concocted.”

²⁸³“These theories take no account of the telegram.”

²⁸⁴“Quite true, Watson. ²⁸⁵The telegram still remains the only solid thing with which we have to deal, and we must not permit our attention to wander away from it. ²⁸⁶It is to gain light upon the purpose of this telegram that we are now upon our way to Cambridge. ²⁸⁷The path of our investigation is at present obscure, but I shall be very much surprised if before evening we have not cleared it up or made a considerable advance along it.”

²⁸⁸It was already dark when we reached the old University city. ²⁸⁹Holmes took a cab at the station, and ordered the man to drive to the house of Dr. Leslie Armstrong. ²⁹⁰A few minutes later we had stopped at a large mansion in the busiest thoroughfare. ²⁹¹We were shown in, and after a long wait were at last admitted into the consulting-room, where we found the doctor seated behind his table.

²⁹²It argues the degree in which I had lost touch with my profession that the name of Leslie Armstrong was unknown to me. ²⁹³Now I am aware that he is not only one of the heads of the medical school of the University, but a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science. ²⁹⁴Yet even without knowing his brilliant record one could not fail to be impressed by a mere glance at the man, the square, massive face, the brooding eyes under the thatched brows, and the granite moulding of the inflexible jaw. ²⁹⁵A man of deep character, a man with an alert mind, grim, ascetic, self-contained, formidable—so I read Dr. Leslie Armstrong. ²⁹⁶He held my friend's card in his hand, and he looked up with no very pleased expression upon his dour features.

²⁹⁷“I have heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I am aware of your profession, one of which I by no means approve.”

²⁹⁸“In that, doctor, you will find yourself in agreement with every criminal in the country,” said my friend, quietly.

²⁹⁹“So far as your efforts are directed towards the suppression of crime, sir, they must have the support of every reasonable member of the community, though I cannot doubt that the official machinery is amply sufficient for the purpose. ³⁰⁰Where your calling is more open to criticism is when you pry into the secrets of private individuals, when you rake up family matters which are better hidden, and when you incidentally waste the time of men who are more busy than yourself. ³⁰¹At the present moment, for example, I should be writing a treatise instead of conversing with you.”

³⁰²“No doubt, doctor; and yet the conversation may prove more important than the treatise. ³⁰³Incidentally I may tell you that we are doing the reverse of what you very justly blame, and that we are endeavouring to prevent anything like public exposure of private matters which must necessarily follow when once the case is fairly in the hands of the official police. ³⁰⁴You may look upon me simply as an irregular pioneer who goes in front of the regular forces of the country. ³⁰⁵I have come to ask you about Mr. Godfrey Staunton.”

³⁰⁶“What about him?”

³⁰⁷“You know him, do you not?”

³⁰⁸“He is an intimate friend of mine.”

³⁰⁹“You are aware that he has disappeared?”

³¹⁰“Ah, indeed!” ³¹¹There was no change of expression in the rugged features of the doctor.

³¹²“He left his hotel last night. ³¹³He has not been heard of.”

³¹⁴“No doubt he will return.”

³¹⁵“To-morrow is the 'Varsity football match.”

³¹⁶“I have no sympathy with these childish games. ³¹⁷The young man's fate interests me deeply, since I know him and like him. ³¹⁸The football match does not come within my horizon at all.”

³¹⁹“I claim your sympathy, then, in my investigation of Mr. Staunton's fate. ³²⁰Do you know where he is?”

³²¹“Certainly not.”

³²²“You have not seen him since yesterday?”

³²³“No, I have not.”

³²⁴“Was Mr. Staunton a healthy man?”

³²⁵“Absolutely.”

³²⁶“Did you ever know him ill?”

³²⁷“Never.”

³²⁸Holmes popped a sheet of paper before the doctor's eyes. ³²⁹“Then perhaps you will explain this receipted bill for thirteen guineas, paid by Mr. Godfrey Staunton last month to Dr. Leslie Armstrong of Cambridge. ³³⁰I picked it out from among the papers upon his desk.”

³³¹The doctor flushed with anger.

³³²“I do not feel that there is any reason why I should render an explanation to you, Mr. Holmes.”

³³³Holmes replaced the bill in his note-book. ³³⁴“If you prefer a public explanation it must come sooner or later,” said he. ³³⁵“I have already told you that I can hush up that which others will be bound to publish, and you would really be wiser to take me into your complete confidence.”

³³⁶“I know nothing about it.”

³³⁷“Did you hear from Mr. Staunton in London?”

³³⁸“Certainly not.”

³³⁹“Dear me, dear me; the post-office again!” ³⁴⁰Holmes sighed, wearily. ³⁴¹“A most urgent telegram was dispatched to you from London by Godfrey Staunton at six-fifteen yesterday evening—a telegram which is undoubtedly associated with his disappearance—and yet you have not had it. ³⁴²It is most culpable. ³⁴³I shall certainly go down to the office here and register a complaint.”

³⁴⁴Dr. Leslie Armstrong sprang up from behind his desk, and his dark face was crimson with fury.

³⁴⁵“I'll trouble you to walk out of my house, sir,” said he. ³⁴⁶“You can tell your employer, Lord Mount-James, that I do not wish to have anything to do either with him or with his agents. ³⁴⁷No, sir, not another word!” ³⁴⁸He rang the bell furiously. ³⁴⁹“John, show these gentlemen out!” ³⁵⁰A pompous butler ushered us severely to the door, and we found ourselves in the street. ³⁵¹Holmes burst out laughing.

³⁵²“Dr. Leslie Armstrong is certainly a man of energy and character,” said he. ³⁵³“I have not seen a man who, if he turned his talents that way, was more calculated to fill the gap left by the illustrious Moriarty. ³⁴⁴And now, my poor Watson, here we are, stranded and friendless in this inhospitable town, which we cannot leave without abandoning our case. ³⁴⁵This little inn just opposite Armstrong's house is singularly adapted to our needs. ³⁴⁶If you would engage a front room and purchase the necessaries for the night, I may have time to make a few inquiries.”

³⁴⁷These few inquiries proved, however, to be a more lengthy proceeding than Holmes had imagined, for he did not return to the inn until nearly nine o'clock. ³⁴⁸He was pale and dejected, stained with dust, and exhausted with hunger and fatigue. ³⁴⁹A cold supper was ready upon the table, and when his needs were satisfied and his pipe alight he was ready to take that half comic and wholly philosophic view which was natural to him when his affairs were going awry. ³⁵⁰The sound of carriage wheels caused him to rise and glance out of the window. ³⁵¹A brougham and pair of greys under the glare of a gas-lamp stood before the doctor's door.

³⁵²“It's been out three hours,” said Holmes; “started at half-past six, and here it is back again. ³⁵³That gives a radius of ten or twelve miles, and he does it once, or sometimes twice, a day.”

³⁵⁴“No unusual thing for a doctor in practice.”

³⁵⁵“But Armstrong is not really a doctor in practice. ³⁵⁶He is a lecturer and a consultant, but he does not care for general practice, which distracts him from his literary work. ³⁵⁷Why, then, does he make these long journeys, which must be exceedingly irksome to him, and who is it that he visits?”

³⁵⁸“His coachman—”

³⁵⁹“My dear Watson, can you doubt that it was to him that I first applied? ³⁶⁰I do not know whether it came from his own innate depravity or from the promptings of his master, but he was rude enough to set a dog at me. ³⁶¹Neither dog nor man liked the look of my stick, however, and the matter fell through. ³⁶²Relations were strained after that, and further inquiries out of the question. ³⁶³All that I have learned I got from a friendly native in the yard of our own inn. ³⁶⁴It was he who told me of the doctor's habits and of his daily journey. ³⁶⁵At that instant, to give point to his words, the carriage came round to the door.”

³⁶⁶“Could you not follow it?”

³⁶⁷“Excellent, Watson! ³⁶⁸You are scintillating this evening. ³⁶⁹The idea did cross my mind. ³⁷⁰There is, as you may have observed, a bicycle shop next to our inn. ³⁷¹Into this I rushed, engaged a bicycle, and was able to get started before the carriage was quite out of sight. ³⁷²I rapidly overtook it, and then, keeping at a discreet distance of a hundred yards or so, I followed its lights until we were clear of the town. ³⁷³We had got well out on the country road when a somewhat mortifying incident occurred. ³⁷⁴The carriage stopped, the doctor alighted, walked swiftly back to where I had also halted, and told me in an excellent sardonic fashion that he feared the road was narrow, and that he hoped his carriage did not impede the passage of my bicycle. ³⁷⁵Nothing could have been more admirable than his way of putting it. ³⁷⁶I at once rode past the carriage, and, keeping to the main road, I went on for a few miles, and then halted in a convenient place to see if the carriage passed. ³⁷⁷There was no sign of it, however, and so it became evident that it had turned down one of several side roads which I had observed. ³⁷⁸I rode back, but again saw nothing of the carriage, and now, as you perceive, it has returned after me. ³⁷⁹Of course, I had at the outset no particular reason to connect these journeys with the disappearance of Godfrey Staunton, and was only inclined to investigate them on the general grounds that everything which concerns Dr. Armstrong is at present of interest to us; but, now that I find he keeps so keen a look-out upon anyone who may follow him on these excursions, the affair appears more important, and I shall not be satisfied until I have made the matter clear.”

³⁸⁰“We can follow him to-morrow.”

³⁸¹“Can we? ³⁸²It is not so easy as you seem to think. ³⁸³You are not familiar with Cambridgeshire scenery, are you? ³⁸⁴It does not lend itself to concealment. ³⁸⁵All this country that I passed over to-night is as flat and clean as the palm of your hand, and the man we are following is no fool, as he very clearly showed to-night. ³⁸⁶I have wired to Overton to let us know any fresh London developments at this address, and in the meantime we can only concentrate our attention upon Dr. Armstrong, whose name the obliging young lady at the office allowed me to read upon the counterfoil of Staunton's urgent message. ³⁸⁷He knows where the young man is—to that I'll swear—and if he knows, then it must be our own fault if we cannot manage to know also. ³⁸⁸At present it must be admitted that the odd trick is in his possession, and, as you are aware, Watson, it is not my habit to leave the game in that condition.”

³⁸⁹And yet the next day brought us no nearer to the solution of the mystery. ³⁹⁰A note was handed in after breakfast, which Holmes passed across to me with a smile.

³⁹¹Sir [it ran]:

³⁹²I can assure you that you are wasting your time in dogging my movements. ³⁹³I have, as you discovered last night, a window at the back of my brougham, and if you desire a twenty-mile ride which will lead you to the spot from which you started, you have only to follow me. ³⁹⁴Meanwhile, I can inform you that no spying upon me can in any way help Mr. Godfrey Staunton, and I am convinced that the best service you can do to that gentleman is to return at once to London and to report to your employer that you are unable to trace him. ³⁹⁵Your time in Cambridge will certainly be wasted.

³⁹⁶Yours faithfully,

³⁹⁷Leslie Armstrong.

³⁹⁸“An outspoken, honest antagonist is the doctor,” said Holmes. ³⁹⁹“Well, well, he excites my curiosity, and I must really know more before I leave him.”

⁴⁰⁰“His carriage is at his door now,” said I. ⁴⁰¹“There he is stepping into it. I saw him glance up at our window as he did so. ⁴⁰²Suppose I try my luck upon the bicycle?”

⁴⁰³“No, no, my dear Watson! ⁴⁰⁴With all respect for your natural acumen I do not think that you are quite a match for the worthy doctor. ⁴⁰⁵I think that possibly I can attain our end by some independent explorations of my own. ⁴⁰⁶I am afraid that I must leave you to your own devices, as the appearance of two inquiring strangers upon a sleepy countryside might excite more gossip than I care for. ⁴⁰⁷No doubt you will find some sights to amuse you in this venerable city, and I hope to bring back a more favourable report to you before evening.”

⁴⁰⁸Once more, however, my friend was destined to be disappointed. ⁴⁰⁹He came back at night weary and unsuccessful.

⁴¹⁰“I have had a blank day, Watson. ⁴¹¹Having got the doctor's general direction, I spent the day in visiting all the villages upon that side of Cambridge, and comparing notes with publicans and other local news agencies. ⁴¹²I have covered some ground: Chesterton, Histon, Waterbeach, and Oakington have each been explored and have each proved disappointing. ⁴¹³The daily appearance of a brougham and pair could hardly have been overlooked in such Sleepy Hollows. ⁴¹⁴The doctor has scored once more. ⁴¹⁵Is there a telegram for me?”

⁴¹⁶“Yes; I opened it. ⁴¹⁷Here it is:

⁴¹⁸“‘Ask for Pompey from Jeremy Dixon, Trinity College.’

⁴¹⁹“I don't understand it.”

⁴²⁰“Oh, it is clear enough. ⁴²¹It is from our friend Overton, and is in answer to a question from me. ⁴²²I'll just send round a note to Mr. Jeremy Dixon, and then I have no doubt that our luck will turn. ⁴²³By the way, is there any news of the match?”

⁴²⁴“Yes, the local evening paper has an excellent account in its last edition. ⁴²⁵Oxford won by a goal and two tries. ⁴²⁶The last sentences of the description say:

⁴²⁷“The defeat of the Light Blues may be entirely attributed to the unfortunate absence of the crack International, Godfrey Staunton, whose want was felt at every instant of the game. ⁴²⁸The lack of combination in the three-quarter line and their weakness both in attack and defence more than neutralized the efforts of a heavy and hard-working pack.”

⁴²⁹“Then our friend Overton's forebodings have been justified,” said Holmes. ⁴³⁰“Personally I am in agreement with Dr. Armstrong, and football does not come within my horizon. ⁴³¹Early to bed to-night, Watson, for I foresee that to-morrow may be an eventful day.”

⁴³²I was horrified by my first glimpse of Holmes next morning, for he sat by the fire holding his tiny hypodermic syringe. ⁴³³I associated that instrument with the single weakness of his nature, and I feared the worst when I saw it glittering in his hand. ⁴³⁴He laughed at my expression of dismay, and laid it upon the table.

⁴³⁵“No, no, my dear fellow, there is no cause for alarm. ⁴³⁶It is not upon this occasion the instrument of evil, but it will rather prove to be the key which will unlock our mystery. ⁴³⁷On this syringe I base all my hopes. ⁴³⁸I have just returned from a small scouting expedition and everything is favourable. ⁴³⁹Eat a good breakfast, Watson, for I propose to get upon Dr. Armstrong's trail to-day, and once on it I will not stop for rest or food until I run him to his burrow.”

⁴⁴⁰“In that case,” said I, “we had best carry our breakfast with us, for he is making an early start. ⁴⁴¹His carriage is at the door.”

⁴⁴²“Never mind. ⁴⁴³Let him go. ⁴⁴⁴He will be clever if he can drive where I cannot follow him. ⁴⁴⁵When you have finished come downstairs with me, and I will introduce you to a detective who is a very eminent specialist in the work that lies before us.”

⁴⁴⁶When we descended I followed Holmes into the stable yard, where he opened the door of a loose-box and led out a squat, lop-eared, white-and-tan dog, something between a beagle and a foxhound.

⁴⁴⁷“Let me introduce you to Pompey,” said he. ⁴⁴⁸“Pompey is the pride of the local draghounds, no very great flier, as his build will show, but a staunch hound on a scent. ⁴⁴⁹Well, Pompey, you may not be fast, but I expect you will be too fast for a couple of middle-aged London gentlemen, so I will take the liberty of fastening this leather leash to your collar. ⁴⁵⁰Now, boy, come along, and show what you can do.” ⁴⁵¹He led him across to the doctor's door. ⁴⁵²The dog sniffed round for an instant, and then with a shrill whine of excitement started off down the street, tugging at his leash in his efforts to go faster. ⁴⁵³In half an hour, we were clear of the town and hastening down a country road.

⁴⁵⁴“What have you done, Holmes?” I asked.

⁴⁵⁵“A threadbare and venerable device, but useful upon occasion. ⁴⁵⁶I walked into the doctor's yard this morning and shot my syringe full of aniseed over the hind wheel. ⁴⁵⁷A draghound will follow aniseed from here to John o' Groat's, and our friend Armstrong would have to drive through the Cam before he would shake Pompey off his trail. ⁴⁵⁸Oh, the cunning rascal! ⁴⁵⁹This is how he gave me the slip the other night.”

⁴⁶⁰The dog had suddenly turned out of the main road into a grass-grown lane. ⁴⁶¹Half a mile farther this opened into another broad road, and the trail turned hard to the right in the direction of the town, which

we had just quitted. ⁴⁶²The road took a sweep to the south of the town and continued in the opposite direction to that in which we started.

⁴⁶³“This détour has been entirely for our benefit, then?” said Holmes. ⁴⁶⁴“No wonder that my inquiries among those villages led to nothing. ⁴⁶⁵The doctor has certainly played the game for all it is worth, and one would like to know the reason for such elaborate deception. ⁴⁶⁶This should be the village of Trumpington to the right of us. ⁴⁶⁷And, by Jove! here is the brougham coming round the corner. ⁴⁶⁸Quick, Watson, quick, or we are done!”

⁴⁶⁹He sprang through a gate into a field, dragging the reluctant Pompey after him. ⁴⁷⁰We had hardly got under the shelter of the hedge when the carriage rattled past. ⁴⁷¹I caught a glimpse of Dr. Armstrong within, his shoulders bowed, his head sunk on his hands, the very image of distress. ⁴⁷²I could tell by my companion's graver face that he also had seen.

⁴⁷³“I fear there is some dark ending to our quest,” said he. ⁴⁷⁴“It cannot be long before we know it. ⁴⁷⁵Come, Pompey! ⁴⁷⁶Ah, it is the cottage in the field!”

⁴⁷⁷There could be no doubt that we had reached the end of our journey. ⁴⁷⁸Pompey ran about and whined eagerly outside the gate where the marks of the brougham's wheels were still to be seen. ⁴⁷⁹A footpath led across to the lonely cottage. ⁴⁸⁰Holmes tied the dog to the hedge, and we hastened onwards. ⁴⁸¹My friend knocked at the little rustic door, and knocked again without response. ⁴⁸²And yet the cottage was not deserted, for a low sound came to our ears—a kind of drone of misery and despair, which was indescribably melancholy. ⁴⁸³Holmes paused irresolute, and then he glanced back at the road which we had just traversed. ⁴⁸⁴A brougham was coming down it, and there could be no mistaking those grey horses.

⁴⁸⁵“By Jove, the doctor is coming back!” cried Holmes. ⁴⁸⁶“That settles it. ⁴⁸⁷We are bound to see what it means before he comes.”

⁴⁸⁸He opened the door and we stepped into the hall. ⁴⁸⁹The droning sound swelled louder upon our ears until it became one long, deep wail of distress. ⁴⁹⁰It came from upstairs. ⁴⁹¹Holmes darted up and I followed him. ⁴⁹²He pushed open a half-closed door and we both stood appalled at the sight before us.

⁴⁹³A woman, young and beautiful, was lying dead upon the bed. ⁴⁹⁴Her calm, pale face, with dim, wide-opened blue eyes, looked upward from amid a great tangle of golden hair. ⁴⁹⁵At the foot of the bed, half sitting, half kneeling, his face buried in the clothes, was a young man, whose frame was racked by his sobs. ⁴⁹⁶So absorbed was he by his bitter grief that he never looked up until Holmes's hand was on his shoulder.

⁴⁹⁷“Are you Mr. Godfrey Staunton?”

⁴⁹⁸“Yes, yes; I am—but you are too late. ⁴⁹⁹She is dead.”

⁵⁰⁰The man was so dazed that he could not be made to understand that we were anything but doctors who had been sent to his assistance. ⁵⁰¹Holmes was endeavouring to utter a few words of consolation, and to explain the alarm which had been caused to his friends by his sudden disappearance, when there was a step upon the stairs, and there was the heavy, stern, questioning face of Dr. Armstrong at the door.

⁵⁰²“So, gentlemen,” said he, “you have attained your end, and have certainly chosen a particularly delicate moment for your intrusion. ⁵⁰³I would not brawl in the presence of death, but I can assure you that if I were a younger man your monstrous conduct would not pass with impunity.”

⁵⁰⁴“Excuse me, Dr. Armstrong, I think we are a little at cross-purposes,” said my friend, with dignity.

⁵⁰⁵“If you could step downstairs with us we may each be able to give some light to the other upon this miserable affair.”

⁵⁰⁶A minute later the grim doctor and ourselves were in the sitting-room below.

⁵⁰⁷“Well, sir?” said he.

⁵⁰⁸“I wish you to understand, in the first place, that I am not employed by Lord Mount-James, and that my sympathies in this matter are entirely against that nobleman. ⁵⁰⁹When a man is lost it is my duty to ascertain his fate, but having done so the matter ends so far as I am concerned; and so long as there is nothing criminal, I am much more anxious to hush up private scandals than to give them publicity. ⁵¹⁰If, as I imagine, there is no breach of the law in this matter, you can absolutely depend upon my discretion and my co-operation in keeping the facts out of the papers.”

⁵¹¹Dr. Armstrong took a quick step forward and wrung Holmes by the hand.

⁵¹²“You are a good fellow,” said he. ⁵¹³“I had misjudged you. ⁵¹⁴I thank Heaven that my compunction at leaving poor Staunton all alone in this plight caused me to turn my carriage back, and so to make your acquaintance. ⁵¹⁵Knowing as much as you do, the situation is very easily explained. ⁵¹⁶A year ago Godfrey Staunton lodged in London for a time, and became passionately attached to his landlady's daughter, whom he married. ⁵¹⁷She was as good as she was beautiful, and as intelligent as she was good. ⁵¹⁸No man need be ashamed of such a wife. ⁵¹⁹But Godfrey was the heir to this crabbed old nobleman, and it was quite certain that the news of his marriage would have been the end of his inheritance. ⁵²⁰I knew the lad well, and I loved him for his many excellent qualities. ⁵²¹I did all I could to help him to keep things straight. ⁵²²We did our very best to keep the thing from everyone, for when once such a whisper gets about it is not long before everyone has heard it. ⁵²³Thanks to this lonely cottage and his own discretion, Godfrey has up to now succeeded. ⁵²⁴Their secret was known to no one save to me and to one excellent servant who has at present gone for assistance to Trumpington. ⁵²⁵But at last there came a terrible blow in the shape of dangerous illness to his wife. ⁵²⁶It was consumption of the most virulent kind. ⁵²⁷The poor boy was half crazed with grief, and yet he had to go to London to play this match, for he could not get out of it without explanations which would expose his secret. ⁵²⁸I tried to cheer him up by a wire, and he sent me one in reply imploring me to do all I could. ⁵²⁹This was the telegram which you appear in some inexplicable way to have seen. ⁵³⁰I did not tell him how urgent the danger was, for I knew that he could do no good here, but I sent the truth to the girl's father, and he very injudiciously communicated it to Godfrey. ⁵³¹The result was that he came straight away in a state bordering on frenzy, and has remained in the same state, kneeling at the end of her bed, until this morning death put an end to her sufferings. ⁵³²That is all, Mr. Holmes, and I am sure that I can rely upon your discretion and that of your friend.”

⁵³³Holmes grasped the doctor's hand.

⁵³⁴“Come, Watson,” said he, and we passed from that house of grief into the pale sunlight of the winter day.

The Adventure of the Abbey Grange

¹It was on a bitterly cold and frosty morning during the winter of '97 that I was awakened by a tugging at my shoulder. ²It was Holmes. ³The candle in his hand shone upon his eager, stooping face and told me at a glance that something was amiss.

⁴"Come, Watson, come!" he cried. ⁵"The game is afoot. ⁶Not a word! ⁷Into your clothes and come!"

⁸Ten minutes later we were both in a cab and rattling through the silent streets on our way to Charing Cross Station. ⁹The first faint winter's dawn was beginning to appear, and we could dimly see the occasional figure of an early workman as he passed us, blurred and indistinct in the opalescent London reek. ¹⁰Holmes nestled in silence into his heavy coat, and I was glad to do the same, for the air was most bitter and neither of us had broken our fast. ¹¹It was not until we had consumed some hot tea at the station, and taken our places in the Kentish train, that we were sufficiently thawed, he to speak and I to listen. ¹²Holmes drew a note from his pocket and read it aloud:

¹³"Abbey Grange, Marsham, Kent,

¹⁴"3.30 a.m.

¹⁵"My dear Mr. Holmes:

¹⁶"I should be very glad of your immediate assistance in what promises to be a most remarkable case. ¹⁷It is something quite in your line. ¹⁸Except for releasing the lady I will see that everything is kept exactly as I have found it, but I beg you not to lose an instant, as it is difficult to leave Sir Eustace there.

¹⁹"Yours faithfully,

²⁰"Stanley Hopkins."

²¹"Hopkins has called me in seven times, and on each occasion his summons has been entirely justified," said Holmes. ²²"I fancy that every one of his cases has found its way into your collection, and I must admit, Watson, that you have some power of selection which atones for much which I deplore in your narratives. ²³Your fatal habit of looking at everything from the point of view of a story instead of as a scientific exercise has ruined what might have been an instructive and even classical series of demonstrations. ²⁴You slur over work of the utmost finesse and delicacy in order to dwell upon sensational details which may excite, but cannot possibly instruct, the reader."

²⁵"Why do you not write them yourself?" I said, with some bitterness.

²⁶"I will, my dear Watson, I will. ²⁷At present I am, as you know, fairly busy, but I propose to devote my declining years to the composition of a text-book which shall focus the whole art of detection into one volume. ²⁸Our present research appears to be a case of murder."

²⁹"You think this Sir Eustace is dead, then?"

³⁰"I should say so. ³¹Hopkins's writing shows considerable agitation, and he is not an emotional man. ³²Yes, I gather there has been violence, and that the body is left for our inspection. ³³A mere suicide would not have caused him to send for me. ³⁴As to the release of the lady, it would appear that she has been locked in her room during the tragedy. ³⁵We are moving in high life, Watson; crackling paper, 'E.B.' monogram, coat-of-arms, picturesque address. ³⁶I think that friend Hopkins will live up to his reputation and that we shall have an interesting morning. ³⁷The crime was committed before twelve last night."

³⁸"How can you possibly tell?"

³⁹“By an inspection of the trains and by reckoning the time. ⁴⁰The local police had to be called in, they had to communicate with Scotland Yard, Hopkins had to go out, and he in turn had to send for me. ⁴¹All that makes a fair night's work. ⁴²Well, here we are at Chislehurst Station, and we shall soon set our doubts at rest.”

⁴³A drive of a couple of miles through narrow country lanes brought us to a park gate, which was opened for us by an old lodge-keeper, whose haggard face bore the reflection of some great disaster. ⁴⁴The avenue ran through a noble park, between lines of ancient elms, and ended in a low, widespread house, pillared in front after the fashion of Palladio. ⁴⁵The central part was evidently of a great age and shrouded in ivy, but the large windows showed that modern changes had been carried out, and one wing of the house appeared to be entirely new. ⁴⁶The youthful figure and alert, eager face of Inspector Stanley Hopkins confronted us in the open doorway.

⁴⁷“I'm very glad you have come, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁸And you too, Dr. Watson! ⁴⁹But, indeed, if I had my time over again I should not have troubled you, for since the lady has come to herself she has given so clear an account of the affair that there is not much left for us to do. ⁵⁰You remember that Lewisham gang of burglars?”

⁵¹“What, the three Randalls?”

⁵²“Exactly; the father and two sons. ⁵³It's their work. ⁵⁴I have not a doubt of it. ⁵⁵They did a job at Sydenham a fortnight ago, and were seen and described. ⁵⁶Rather cool to do another so soon and so near, but it is they, beyond all doubt. ⁵⁷It's a hanging matter this time.”

⁵⁸“Sir Eustace is dead, then?”

⁵⁹“Yes; his head was knocked in with his own poker.”

⁶⁰“Sir Eustace Brackenstall, the driver tells me.”

⁶¹“Exactly—one of the richest men in Kent. ⁶²Lady Brackenstall is in the morning-room. ⁶³Poor lady, she has had a most dreadful experience. ⁶⁴She seemed half dead when I saw her first. ⁶⁵I think you had best see her and hear her account of the facts. ⁶⁶Then we will examine the dining-room together.”

⁶⁷Lady Brackenstall was no ordinary person. ⁶⁸Seldom have I seen so graceful a figure, so womanly a presence, and so beautiful a face. ⁶⁹She was a blonde, golden-haired, blue-eyed, and would, no doubt, have had the perfect complexion which goes with such colouring had not her recent experience left her drawn and haggard. ⁷⁰Her sufferings were physical as well as mental, for over one eye rose a hideous, plum-coloured swelling, which her maid, a tall, austere woman, was bathing assiduously with vinegar and water. ⁷¹The lady lay back exhausted upon a couch, but her quick, observant gaze as we entered the room, and the alert expression of her beautiful features, showed that neither her wits nor her courage had been shaken by her terrible experience. ⁷²She was enveloped in a loose dressing-gown of blue and silver, but a black sequin-covered dinner-dress was hung upon the couch beside her.

⁷³“I have told you all that happened, Mr. Hopkins,” she said, wearily; “could you not repeat it for me?”

⁷⁴Well, if you think it necessary, I will tell these gentlemen what occurred. ⁷⁵Have they been in the dining-room yet?”

⁷⁶“I thought they had better hear your ladyship's story first.”

⁷⁷“I shall be glad when you can arrange matters. ⁷⁸It is horrible to me to think of him still lying there.”

⁷⁹She shuddered and buried her face in her hands. ⁸⁰As she did so the loose gown fell back from her forearms. ⁸¹Holmes uttered an exclamation.

⁸²“You have other injuries, madam! ⁸³What is this?” ⁸⁴Two vivid red spots stood out on one of the white, round limbs. ⁸⁵She hastily covered it.

⁸⁶“It is nothing. ⁸⁷It has no connection with the hideous business of last night. ⁸⁸If you and your friend will sit down I will tell you all I can.

⁸⁹“I am the wife of Sir Eustace Brackenstall. ⁹⁰I have been married about a year. ⁹¹I suppose that it is no use my attempting to conceal that our marriage has not been a happy one. ⁹²I fear that all our neighbours would tell you that, even if I were to attempt to deny it. ⁹³Perhaps the fault may be partly mine. ⁹⁴I was brought up in the freer, less conventional atmosphere of South Australia, and this English life, with its proprieties and its primness, is not congenial to me. ⁹⁵But the main reason lies in the one fact which is notorious to everyone, and that is that Sir Eustace was a confirmed drunkard. ⁹⁶To be with such a man for an hour is unpleasant. ⁹⁷Can you imagine what it means for a sensitive and high-spirited woman to be tied to him for day and night? ⁹⁸It is a sacrilege, a crime, a villainy to hold that such a marriage is binding. ⁹⁹I say that these monstrous laws of yours will bring a curse upon the land—Heaven will not let such wickedness endure.” ¹⁰⁰For an instant she sat up, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes blazing from under the terrible mark upon her brow. ¹⁰¹Then the strong, soothing hand of the austere maid drew her head down on to the cushion, and the wild anger died away into passionate sobbing. ¹⁰²At last she continued:—

¹⁰³“I will tell you about last night. ¹⁰⁴You are aware, perhaps, that in this house all servants sleep in the modern wing. ¹⁰⁵This central block is made up of the dwelling-rooms, with the kitchen behind and our bedroom above. ¹⁰⁶My maid Theresa sleeps above my room. ¹⁰⁷There is no one else, and no sound could alarm those who are in the farther wing. ¹⁰⁸This must have been well known to the robbers, or they would not have acted as they did.

¹⁰⁹“Sir Eustace retired about half-past ten. ¹¹⁰The servants had already gone to their quarters. ¹¹¹Only my maid was up, and she had remained in her room at the top of the house until I needed her services. ¹¹²I sat until after eleven in this room, absorbed in a book. ¹¹³Then I walked round to see that all was right before I went upstairs. ¹¹⁴It was my custom to do this myself, for, as I have explained, Sir Eustace was not always to be trusted. ¹¹⁵I went into the kitchen, the butler's pantry, the gun-room, the billiard-room, the drawing-room, and finally the dining-room. ¹¹⁶As I approached the window, which is covered with thick curtains, I suddenly felt the wind blow upon my face and realized that it was open. ¹¹⁷I flung the curtain aside and found myself face to face with a broad-shouldered, elderly man who had just stepped into the room. ¹¹⁸The window is a long French one, which really forms a door leading to the lawn. ¹¹⁹I held my bedroom candle lit in my hand, and, by its light, behind the first man I saw two others, who were in the act of entering. ¹²⁰I stepped back, but the fellow was on me in an instant. ¹²¹He caught me first by the wrist and then by the throat. ¹²²I opened my mouth to scream, but he struck me a savage blow with his fist over the eye, and felled me to the ground. ¹²³I must have been unconscious for a few minutes, for when I came to myself I found that they had torn down the bell-rope and had secured me tightly to the oaken chair which stands at the head of the dining-room table. ¹²⁴I was so firmly bound that I could not move, and a handkerchief round my mouth prevented me from uttering any sound. ¹²⁵It was at this instant that my unfortunate husband entered the room. ¹²⁶He had evidently heard some suspicious sounds, and he came prepared for such a scene as he found. ¹²⁷He was dressed in his shirt and trousers, with his favourite blackthorn cudgel in his hand. ¹²⁸He rushed at one of the burglars, but another—it was the elderly man—stooped, picked the poker out of the grate, and struck him a horrible blow as he passed. ¹²⁹He fell without a groan, and never moved again. ¹³⁰I fainted once more, but again it could only have been a very few minutes during which I was insensible. ¹³¹When I opened my eyes I found that they had collected the silver from the sideboard, and they had drawn a bottle of wine which stood there. ¹³²Each of them had a glass in his hand. ¹³³I have already told you, have I not, that one was elderly, with a beard, and the others young, hairless lads. ¹³⁴They might have been a father with his two sons. ¹³⁵They talked together in whispers. ¹³⁶Then they came over and made sure that I was still securely bound. ¹³⁷Finally they withdrew, closing the window after them. ¹³⁸It was quite a quarter of an hour before I got my mouth free. ¹³⁹When I did so my screams brought the maid to my assistance. ¹⁴⁰The other servants were soon alarmed, and we sent for the local police, who instantly communicated with

London. ¹⁴¹That is really all that I can tell you, gentlemen, and I trust that it will not be necessary for me to go over so painful a story again."

¹⁴²"Any questions, Mr. Holmes?" asked Hopkins.

¹⁴³"I will not impose any further tax upon Lady Brackenstall's patience and time," said Holmes.

¹⁴⁴"Before I go into the dining-room I should like to hear your experience." ¹⁴⁵He looked at the maid.

¹⁴⁶"I saw the men before ever they came into the house," said she. ¹⁴⁷"As I sat by my bedroom window I saw three men in the moonlight down by the lodge gate yonder, but I thought nothing of it at the time.

¹⁴⁸It was more than an hour after that I heard my mistress scream, and down I ran, to find her, poor lamb, just as she says, and him on the floor with his blood and brains over the room. ¹⁴⁹It was enough to drive a woman out of her wits, tied there, and her very dress spotted with him; but she never wanted courage, did Miss Mary Fraser of Adelaide, and Lady Brackenstall of Abbey Grange hasn't learned new ways. ¹⁵⁰You've questioned her long enough, you gentlemen, and now she is coming to her own room, just with her old Theresa, to get the rest that she badly needs."

¹⁵¹With a motherly tenderness the gaunt woman put her arm round her mistress and led her from the room.

¹⁵²"She has been with her all her life," said Hopkins. ¹⁵³"Nursed her as a baby, and came with her to England when they first left Australia eighteen months ago. ¹⁵⁴Theresa Wright is her name, and the kind of maid you don't pick up nowadays. ¹⁵⁵This way, Mr. Holmes, if you please!"

¹⁵⁶The keen interest had passed out of Holmes's expressive face, and I knew that with the mystery all the charm of the case had departed. ¹⁵⁷There still remained an arrest to be effected, but what were these commonplace rogues that he should soil his hands with them? ¹⁵⁸An abstruse and learned specialist who finds that he has been called in for a case of measles would experience something of the annoyance which I read in my friend's eyes. ¹⁵⁹Yet the scene in the dining-room of the Abbey Grange was sufficiently strange to arrest his attention and to recall his waning interest.

¹⁶⁰It was a very large and high chamber, with carved oak ceiling, oaken panelling, and a fine array of deer's heads and ancient weapons around the walls. ¹⁶¹At the farther end from the door was the high French window of which we had heard. ¹⁶²Three smaller windows on the right-hand side filled the apartment with cold winter sunshine. ¹⁶³On the left was a large, deep fireplace, with a massive, overhanging oak mantelpiece. ¹⁶⁴Beside the fireplace was a heavy oaken chair with arms and cross-bars at the bottom. ¹⁶⁵In and out through the open woodwork was woven a crimson cord, which was secured at each side to the crosspiece below. ¹⁶⁶In releasing the lady the cord had been slipped off her, but the knots with which it had been secured still remained. ¹⁶⁷These details only struck our attention afterwards, for our thoughts were entirely absorbed by the terrible object which lay upon the tiger-skin hearthrug in front of the fire.

¹⁶⁸It was the body of a tall, well-made man, about forty years of age. ¹⁶⁹He lay upon his back, his face upturned, with his white teeth grinning through his short black beard. ¹⁷⁰His two clenched hands were raised above his head, and a heavy blackthorn stick lay across them. ¹⁷¹His dark, handsome, aquiline features were convulsed into a spasm of vindictive hatred, which had set his dead face in a terribly fiendish expression. ¹⁷²He had evidently been in his bed when the alarm had broken out, for he wore a foppish embroidered night-shirt, and his bare feet projected from his trousers. ¹⁷³His head was horribly injured, and the whole room bore witness to the savage ferocity of the blow which had struck him down. ¹⁷⁴Beside him lay the heavy poker, bent into a curve by the concussion. ¹⁷⁵Holmes examined both it and the indescribable wreck which it had wrought.

¹⁷⁶"He must be a powerful man, this elder Randall," he remarked.

¹⁷⁷"Yes," said Hopkins. ¹⁷⁸"I have some record of the fellow, and he is a rough customer."

¹⁷⁹“You should have no difficulty in getting him.”

¹⁸⁰“Not the slightest. ¹⁸¹We have been on the look-out for him, and there was some idea that he had got away to America. ¹⁸²Now that we know the gang are here I don't see how they can escape. ¹⁸³We have the news at every seaport already, and a reward will be offered before evening. ¹⁸⁴What beats me is how they could have done so mad a thing, knowing that the lady could describe them, and that we could not fail to recognise the description.”

¹⁸⁵“Exactly. ¹⁸⁶One would have expected that they would have silenced Lady Brackenstall as well.”

¹⁸⁷“They may not have realized,” I suggested, “that she had recovered from her faint.”

¹⁸⁸“That is likely enough. ¹⁸⁹If she seemed to be senseless they would not take her life. ¹⁹⁰What about this poor fellow, Hopkins? ¹⁹¹I seem to have heard some queer stories about him.”

¹⁹²“He was a good-hearted man when he was sober, but a perfect fiend when he was drunk, or rather when he was half drunk, for he seldom really went the whole way. ¹⁹³The devil seemed to be in him at such times, and he was capable of anything. ¹⁹⁴From what I hear, in spite of all his wealth and his title, he very nearly came our way once or twice. ¹⁹⁵There was a scandal about his drenching a dog with petroleum and setting it on fire—her ladyship's dog, to make the matter worse—and that was only hushed up with difficulty. ¹⁹⁶Then he threw a decanter at that maid, Theresa Wright; there was trouble about that. ¹⁹⁷On the whole, and between ourselves, it will be a brighter house without him. ¹⁹⁸What are you looking at now?”

¹⁹⁹Holmes was down on his knees examining with great attention the knots upon the red cord with which the lady had been secured. ²⁰⁰Then he carefully scrutinized the broken and frayed end where it had snapped off when the burglar had dragged it down.

²⁰¹“When this was pulled down the bell in the kitchen must have rung loudly,” he remarked.

²⁰²“No one could hear it. ²⁰³The kitchen stands right at the back of the house.”

²⁰⁴“How did the burglar know no one would hear it? ²⁰⁵How dared he pull at a bell-rope in that reckless fashion?”

²⁰⁶“Exactly, Mr. Holmes, exactly. ²⁰⁷You put the very question which I have asked myself again and again. ²⁰⁸There can be no doubt that this fellow must have known the house and its habits. ²⁰⁹He must have perfectly understood that the servants would all be in bed at that comparatively early hour, and that no one could possibly hear a bell ring in the kitchen. ²¹⁰Therefore he must have been in close league with one of the servants. ²¹¹Surely that is evident. ²¹²But there are eight servants, and all of good character.”

²¹³“Other things being equal,” said Holmes, “one would suspect the one at whose head the master threw a decanter. ²¹⁴And yet that would involve treachery towards the mistress to whom this woman seems devoted. ²¹⁵Well, well, the point is a minor one, and when you have Randall you will probably find no difficulty in securing his accomplice. ²¹⁶The lady's story certainly seems to be corroborated, if it needed corroboration, by every detail which we see before us.” ²¹⁷He walked to the French window and threw it open. ²¹⁸“There are no signs here, but the ground is iron hard, and one would not expect them. ²¹⁹I see that these candles on the mantelpiece have been lighted.”

²²⁰“Yes; it was by their light and that of the lady's bedroom candle that the burglars saw their way about.”

²²¹“And what did they take?”

²²²“Well, they did not take much—only half-a-dozen articles of plate off the sideboard. ²²³Lady Brackenstall thinks that they were themselves so disturbed by the death of Sir Eustace that they did not ransack the house as they would otherwise have done.”

²²⁴“No doubt that is true. ²²⁵And yet they drank some wine, I understand.”

²²⁶“To steady their own nerves.”

²²⁷“Exactly. ²²⁸These three glasses upon the sideboard have been untouched, I suppose?”

²²⁹“Yes; and the bottle stands as they left it.”

²³⁰“Let us look at it. ²³¹Halloa! halloa! what is this?”

²³²The three glasses were grouped together, all of them tinged with wine, and one of them containing some dregs of bees-wing. ²³³The bottle stood near them, two-thirds full, and beside it lay a long, deeply-stained cork. ²³⁴Its appearance and the dust upon the bottle showed that it was no common vintage which the murderers had enjoyed.

²³⁵A change had come over Holmes's manner. ²³⁶He had lost his listless expression, and again I saw an alert light of interest in his keen, deep-set eyes. ²³⁷He raised the cork and examined it minutely.

²³⁸“How did they draw it?” he asked.

²³⁹Hopkins pointed to a half-opened drawer. ²⁴⁰In it lay some table linen and a large cork-screw.

²⁴¹“Did Lady Brackenstall say that screw was used?”

²⁴²“No; you remember that she was senseless at the moment when the bottle was opened.”

²⁴³“Quite so. ²⁴⁴As a matter of fact that screw was not used. ²⁴⁵This bottle was opened by a pocket-screw, probably contained in a knife, and not more than an inch and a half long. ²⁴⁶If you examine the top of the cork you will observe that the screw was driven in three times before the cork was extracted. ²⁴⁷It has never been transfixed. ²⁴⁸This long screw would have transfixed it and drawn it with a single pull. ²⁴⁹When you catch this fellow you will find that he has one of these multiplex knives in his possession.”

²⁵⁰“Excellent!” said Hopkins.

²⁵¹“But these glasses do puzzle me, I confess. ²⁵²Lady Brackenstall actually saw the three men drinking, did she not?”

²⁵³“Yes; she was clear about that.”

²⁵⁴“Then there is an end of it. ²⁵⁵What more is to be said? ²⁵⁶And yet you must admit that the three glasses are very remarkable, Hopkins. ²⁵⁷What, you see nothing remarkable! ²⁵⁸Well, well, let it pass. ²⁵⁹Perhaps when a man has special knowledge and special powers like my own it rather encourages him to seek a complex explanation when a simpler one is at hand. ²⁶⁰Of course, it must be a mere chance about the glasses. ²⁶¹Well, good morning, Hopkins. ²⁶²I don't see that I can be of any use to you, and you appear to have your case very clear. ²⁶³You will let me know when Randall is arrested, and any further developments which may occur. ²⁶⁴I trust that I shall soon have to congratulate you upon a successful conclusion. ²⁶⁵Come, Watson, I fancy that we may employ ourselves more profitably at home.”

²⁶⁶During our return journey I could see by Holmes's face that he was much puzzled by something which he had observed. ²⁶⁷Every now and then, by an effort, he would throw off the impression and talk as if the matter were clear, but then his doubts would settle down upon him again, and his knitted brows and abstracted eyes would show that his thoughts had gone back once more to the great dining-room of the Abbey Grange in which this midnight tragedy had been enacted. ²⁶⁸At last, by a sudden impulse, just as

our train was crawling out of a suburban station, he sprang on to the platform and pulled me out after him.

²⁶⁹“Excuse me, my dear fellow,” said he, as we watched the rear carriages of our train disappearing round a curve; “I am sorry to make you the victim of what may seem a mere whim, but on my life, Watson, I simply can't leave that case in this condition. ²⁷⁰Every instinct that I possess cries out against it. ²⁷¹It's wrong—it's all wrong—I'll swear that it's wrong. ²⁷²And yet the lady's story was complete, the maid's corroboration was sufficient, the detail was fairly exact. ²⁷³What have I to put against that? ²⁷⁴Three wine-glasses, that is all. ²⁷⁵But if I had not taken things for granted, if I had examined everything with care which I would have shown had we approached the case *de novo* and had no cut-and-dried story to warp my mind, would I not then have found something more definite to go upon? ²⁷⁶Of course I should. ²⁷⁷Sit down on this bench, Watson, until a train for Chislehurst arrives, and allow me to lay the evidence before you, imploring you in the first instance to dismiss from your mind the idea that anything which the maid or her mistress may have said must necessarily be true. ²⁷⁸The lady's charming personality must not be permitted to warp our judgment.

²⁷⁹“Surely there are details in her story which, if we looked at it in cold blood, would excite our suspicion. ²⁸⁰These burglars made a considerable haul at Sydenham a fortnight ago. ²⁸¹Some account of them and of their appearance was in the papers, and would naturally occur to anyone who wished to invent a story in which imaginary robbers should play a part. ²⁸²As a matter of fact, burglars who have done a good stroke of business are, as a rule, only too glad to enjoy the proceeds in peace and quiet without embarking on another perilous undertaking. ²⁸³Again, it is unusual for burglars to operate at so early an hour; it is unusual for burglars to strike a lady to prevent her screaming, since one would imagine that was the sure way to make her scream; it is unusual for them to commit murder when their numbers are sufficient to overpower one man; it is unusual for them to be content with a limited plunder when there is much more within their reach; and finally I should say that it was very unusual for such men to leave a bottle half empty. ²⁸⁴How do all these unusuals strike you, Watson?”

²⁸⁵“Their cumulative effect is certainly considerable, and yet each of them is quite possible in itself.

²⁸⁶The most unusual thing of all, as it seems to me, is that the lady should be tied to the chair.”

²⁸⁷“Well, I am not so clear about that, Watson; for it is evident that they must either kill her or else secure her in such a way that she could not give immediate notice of their escape. ²⁸⁸But at any rate I have shown, have I not, that there is a certain element of improbability about the lady's story? ²⁸⁹And now on the top of this comes the incident of the wine-glasses.”

²⁹⁰“What about the wine-glasses?”

²⁹¹“Can you see them in your mind's eye?”

²⁹²“I see them clearly.”

²⁹³“We are told that three men drank from them. ²⁹⁴Does that strike you as likely?”

²⁹⁵“Why not? ²⁹⁶There was wine in each glass.”

²⁹⁷“Exactly; but there was bees-wing only in one glass. ²⁹⁸You must have noticed that fact. ²⁹⁹What does that suggest to your mind?”

³⁰⁰“The last glass filled would be most likely to contain bees-wing.”

³⁰¹“Not at all. ³⁰²The bottle was full of it, and it is inconceivable that the first two glasses were clear and the third heavily charged with it. ³⁰³There are two possible explanations, and only two. ³⁰⁴One is that after the second glass was filled the bottle was violently agitated, and so the third glass received the bees-wing. ³⁰⁵That does not appear probable. ³⁰⁶No, no; I am sure that I am right.”

³⁰⁷“What, then, do you suppose?”

³⁰⁸“That only two glasses were used, and that the dregs of both were poured into a third glass, so as to give the false impression that three people had been here. ³⁰⁹In that way all the bees-wing would be in the last glass, would it not? ³¹⁰Yes, I am convinced that this is so. ³¹¹But if I have hit upon the true explanation of this one small phenomenon, then in an instant the case rises from the commonplace to the exceedingly remarkable, for it can only mean that Lady Brackenstall and her maid have deliberately lied to us, that not one word of their story is to be believed, that they have some very strong reason for covering the real criminal, and that we must construct our case for ourselves without any help from them. ³¹²That is the mission which now lies before us, and here, Watson, is the Chislehurst train.”

³¹³The household of the Abbey Grange were much surprised at our return, but Sherlock Holmes, finding that Stanley Hopkins had gone off to report to head-quarters, took possession of the dining-room, locked the door upon the inside, and devoted himself for two hours to one of those minute and laborious investigations which formed the solid basis on which his brilliant edifices of deduction were reared. ³¹⁴Seated in a corner like an interested student who observes the demonstration of his professor, I followed every step of that remarkable research. ³¹⁵The window, the curtains, the carpet, the chair, the rope—each in turn was minutely examined and duly pondered. ³¹⁶The body of the unfortunate baronet had been removed, but all else remained as we had seen it in the morning. ³¹⁷Then, to my astonishment, Holmes climbed up on to the massive mantelpiece. ³¹⁸Far above his head hung the few inches of red cord which were still attached to the wire. ³¹⁹For a long time he gazed upward at it, and then in an attempt to get nearer to it he rested his knee upon a wooden bracket on the wall. ³²⁰This brought his hand within a few inches of the broken end of the rope, but it was not this so much as the bracket itself which seemed to engage his attention. ³²¹Finally he sprang down with an ejaculation of satisfaction.

³²²“It's all right, Watson,” said he. ³²³“We have got our case—one of the most remarkable in our collection. ³²⁴But, dear me, how slow-witted I have been, and how nearly I have committed the blunder of my lifetime! ³²⁵Now, I think that with a few missing links my chain is almost complete.”

³²⁶“You have got your men?”

³²⁷“Man, Watson, man. ³²⁸Only one, but a very formidable person. ³²⁹Strong as a lion—witness the blow that bent that poker. ³³⁰Six foot three in height, active as a squirrel, dexterous with his fingers; finally, remarkably quick-witted, for this whole ingenious story is of his concoction. ³³¹Yes, Watson, we have come upon the handiwork of a very remarkable individual. ³³²And yet in that bell-rope he has given us a clue which should not have left us a doubt.”

³³³“Where was the clue?”

³³⁴“Well, if you were to pull down a bell-rope, Watson, where would you expect it to break? ³³⁵Surely at the spot where it is attached to the wire. ³³⁶Why should it break three inches from the top as this one has done?”

³³⁷“Because it is frayed there?”

³³⁸“Exactly. ³³⁹This end, which we can examine, is frayed. ³⁴⁰He was cunning enough to do that with his knife. ³⁴¹But the other end is not frayed. ³⁴²You could not observe that from here, but if you were on the mantelpiece you would see that it is cut clean off without any mark of fraying whatever. ³⁴³You can reconstruct what occurred. ³⁴⁴The man needed the rope. ³⁴⁵He would not tear it down for fear of giving the alarm by ringing the bell. ³⁴⁶What did he do? ³⁴⁷He sprang up on the mantelpiece, could not quite reach it, put his knee on the bracket—you will see the impression in the dust—and so got his knife to bear upon the cord. ³⁴⁸I could not reach the place by at least three inches, from which I infer that he is at least three inches a bigger man than I. ³⁴⁹Look at that mark upon the seat of the oaken chair! ³⁵⁰What is it?”

³⁵¹“Blood.”

³⁵²“Undoubtedly it is blood. ³⁵³This alone puts the lady's story out of court. ³⁵⁴If she were seated on the chair when the crime was done, how comes that mark? ³⁵⁵No, no; she was placed in the chair after the death of her husband. ³⁵⁶I'll wager that the black dress shows a corresponding mark to this. ³⁵⁷We have not yet met our Waterloo, Watson, but this is our Marengo, for it begins in defeat and ends in victory. ³⁵⁸I should like now to have a few words with the nurse Theresa. ³⁵⁹We must be wary for awhile, if we are to get the information which we want.”

³⁶⁰She was an interesting person, this stern Australian nurse. ³⁶¹Taciturn, suspicious, ungracious, it took some time before Holmes's pleasant manner and frank acceptance of all that she said thawed her into a corresponding amiability. ³⁶²She did not attempt to conceal her hatred for her late employer.

³⁶³“Yes, sir, it is true that he threw the decanter at me. ³⁶⁴I heard him call my mistress a name, and I told him that he would not dare to speak so if her brother had been there. ³⁶⁵Then it was that he threw it at me. ³⁶⁶He might have thrown a dozen if he had but left my bonny bird alone. ³⁶⁷He was for ever illtreating her, and she too proud to complain. ³⁶⁸She will not even tell me all that he has done to her. ³⁶⁹She never told me of those marks on her arm that you saw this morning, but I know very well that they come from a stab with a hat-pin. ³⁷⁰The sly fiend— ³⁷¹Heaven forgive me that I should speak of him so, now that he is dead, but a fiend he was if ever one walked the earth. ³⁷²He was all honey when first we met him, only eighteen months ago, and we both feel as if it were eighteen years. ³⁷³She had only just arrived in London. ³⁷⁴Yes, it was her first voyage—she had never been from home before. ³⁷⁵He won her with his title and his money and his false London ways. ³⁷⁶If she made a mistake she has paid for it, if ever a woman did. ³⁷⁷What month did we meet him? ³⁷⁸Well, I tell you it was just after we arrived. ³⁷⁹We arrived in June, and it was July. ³⁸⁰They were married in January of last year. ³⁸¹Yes, she is down in the morning-room again, and I have no doubt she will see you, but you must not ask too much of her, for she has gone through all that flesh and blood will stand.”

³⁸²Lady Brackenstall was reclining on the same couch, but looked brighter than before. ³⁸³The maid had entered with us, and began once more to foment the bruise upon her mistress's brow.

³⁸⁴“I hope,” said the lady, “that you have not come to cross-examine me again?”

³⁸⁵“No,” Holmes answered, in his gentlest voice, “I will not cause you any unnecessary trouble, Lady Brackenstall, and my whole desire is to make things easy for you, for I am convinced that you are a much-tried woman. ³⁸⁶If you will treat me as a friend and trust me you may find that I will justify your trust.”

³⁸⁷“What do you want me to do?”

³⁸⁸“To tell me the truth.”

³⁸⁹“Mr. Holmes!”

³⁹⁰“No, no, Lady Brackenstall, it is no use. ³⁹¹You may have heard of any little reputation which I possess. ³⁹²I will stake it all on the fact that your story is an absolute fabrication.”

³⁹³Mistress and maid were both staring at Holmes with pale faces and frightened eyes.

³⁹⁴“You are an impudent fellow!” cried Theresa. ³⁹⁵“Do you mean to say that my mistress has told a lie?”

³⁹⁶Holmes rose from his chair.

³⁹⁷“Have you nothing to tell me?”

³⁹⁸“I have told you everything.”

³⁹⁹“Think once more, Lady Brackenstall. ⁴⁰⁰Would it not be better to be frank?”

⁴⁰¹For an instant there was hesitation in her beautiful face. ⁴⁰²Then some new strong thought caused it to set like a mask.

⁴⁰³“I have told you all I know.”

⁴⁰⁴Holmes took his hat and shrugged his shoulders. ⁴⁰⁵“I am sorry,” he said, and without another word we left the room and the house. ⁴⁰⁶There was a pond in the park, and to this my friend led the way. ⁴⁰⁷It was frozen over, but a single hole was left for the convenience of a solitary swan. ⁴⁰⁸Holmes gazed at it and then passed on to the lodge gate. ⁴⁰⁹There he scribbled a short note for Stanley Hopkins and left it with the lodge-keeper.

⁴¹⁰“It may be a hit or it may be a miss, but we are bound to do something for friend Hopkins, just to justify this second visit,” said he. ⁴¹¹“I will not quite take him into my confidence yet. ⁴¹²I think our next scene of operations must be the shipping office of the Adelaide-Southampton line, which stands at the end of Pall Mall, if I remember right. ⁴¹³There is a second line of steamers which connect South Australia with England, but we will draw the larger cover first.”

⁴¹⁴Holmes's card sent in to the manager ensured instant attention, and he was not long in acquiring all the information which he needed. ⁴¹⁵In June of '95 only one of their line had reached a home port. ⁴¹⁶It was the Rock of Gibraltar, their largest and best boat. ⁴¹⁷A reference to the passenger list showed that Miss Fraser of Adelaide, with her maid, had made the voyage in her. ⁴¹⁸The boat was now on her way to Australia, somewhere to the south of the Suez Canal. ⁴¹⁹Her officers were the same as in '95, with one exception. ⁴²⁰The first officer, Mr. Jack Croker, had been made a captain and was to take charge of their new ship, the Bass Rock, sailing in two days' time from Southampton. ⁴²¹He lived at Sydenham, but he was likely to be in that morning for instructions, if we cared to wait for him.

⁴²²No; Mr. Holmes had no desire to see him, but would be glad to know more about his record and character.

⁴²³His record was magnificent. ⁴²⁴There was not an officer in the fleet to touch him. ⁴²⁵As to his character, he was reliable on duty, but a wild, desperate fellow off the deck of his ship, hot-headed, excitable, but loyal, honest, and kind-hearted. ⁴²⁶That was the pith of the information with which Holmes left the office of the Adelaide-Southampton company. ⁴²⁷Thence he drove to Scotland Yard, but instead of entering he sat in his cab with his brows drawn down, lost in profound thought. ⁴²⁸Finally he drove round to the Charing Cross telegraph office, sent off a message, and then, at last, we made for Baker Street once more.

⁴²⁹“No, I couldn't do it, Watson,” said he, as we re-entered our room. ⁴³⁰“Once that warrant was made out nothing on earth would save him. ⁴³¹Once or twice in my career I feel that I have done more real harm by my discovery of the criminal than ever he had done by his crime. ⁴³²I have learned caution now, and I had rather play tricks with the law of England than with my own conscience. ⁴³³Let us know a little more before we act.”

⁴³⁴Before evening we had a visit from Inspector Stanley Hopkins. ⁴³⁵Things were not going very well with him.

⁴³⁶“I believe that you are a wizard, Mr. Holmes. ⁴³⁷I really do sometimes think that you have powers that are not human. ⁴³⁸Now, how on earth could you know that the stolen silver was at the bottom of that pond?”

⁴³⁹“I didn't know it.”

⁴⁴⁰“But you told me to examine it.”

⁴⁴¹“You got it, then?”

⁴⁴²“Yes, I got it.”

⁴⁴³“I am very glad if I have helped you.”

⁴⁴⁴“But you haven't helped me. ⁴⁴⁵You have made the affair far more difficult. ⁴⁴⁶What sort of burglars are they who steal silver and then throw it into the nearest pond?”

⁴⁴⁷“It was certainly rather eccentric behaviour. ⁴⁴⁸I was merely going on the idea that if the silver had been taken by persons who did not want it, who merely took it for a blind as it were, then they would naturally be anxious to get rid of it.”

⁴⁴⁹“But why should such an idea cross your mind?”

⁴⁵⁰“Well, I thought it was possible. ⁴⁵¹When they came out through the French window there was the pond, with one tempting little hole in the ice, right in front of their noses. ⁴⁵²Could there be a better hiding-place?”

⁴⁵³“Ah, a hiding-place—that is better!” cried Stanley Hopkins. ⁴⁵⁴“Yes, yes, I see it all now! ⁴⁵⁵It was early, there were folk upon the roads, they were afraid of being seen with the silver, so they sank it in the pond, intending to return for it when the coast was clear. ⁴⁵⁶Excellent, Mr. Holmes—that is better than your idea of a blind.”

⁴⁵⁷“Quite so; you have got an admirable theory. ⁴⁵⁸I have no doubt that my own ideas were quite wild, but you must admit that they have ended in discovering the silver.”

⁴⁵⁹“Yes, sir, yes. ⁴⁶⁰It was all your doing. ⁴⁶¹But I have had a bad set-back.”

⁴⁶²“A set-back?”

⁴⁶³“Yes, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁶⁴The Randall gang were arrested in New York this morning.”

⁴⁶⁵“Dear me, Hopkins! ⁴⁶⁶That is certainly rather against your theory that they committed a murder in Kent last night.”

⁴⁶⁷“It is fatal, Mr. Holmes, absolutely fatal. ⁴⁶⁸Still, there are other gangs of three besides the Randalls, or it may be some new gang of which the police have never heard.”

⁴⁶⁹“Quite so; it is perfectly possible. ⁴⁷⁰What, are you off?”

⁴⁷¹“Yes, Mr. Holmes; there is no rest for me until I have got to the bottom of the business. ⁴⁷²I suppose you have no hint to give me?”

⁴⁷³“I have given you one.”

⁴⁷⁴“Which?”

⁴⁷⁵“Well, I suggested a blind.”

⁴⁷⁶“But why, Mr. Holmes, why?”

⁴⁷⁷“Ah, that's the question, of course. ⁴⁷⁸But I commend the idea to your mind. ⁴⁷⁹You might possibly find that there was something in it. ⁴⁸⁰You won't stop for dinner? ⁴⁸¹Well, good-bye, and let us know how you get on.”

⁴⁸²Dinner was over and the table cleared before Holmes alluded to the matter again. ⁴⁸³He had lit his pipe and held his slippered feet to the cheerful blaze of the fire. ⁴⁸⁴Suddenly he looked at his watch.

⁴⁸⁵“I expect developments, Watson.”

⁴⁸⁶“When?”

⁴⁸⁷“Now—within a few minutes. ⁴⁸⁸I dare say you thought I acted rather badly to Stanley Hopkins just now?”

⁴⁸⁹“I trust your judgment.”

⁴⁹⁰“A very sensible reply, Watson. ⁴⁹¹You must look at it this way: what I know is unofficial; what he knows is official. ⁴⁹²I have the right to private judgment, but he has none. ⁴⁹³He must disclose all, or he is a traitor to his service. ⁴⁹⁴In a doubtful case I would not put him in so painful a position, and so I reserve my information until my own mind is clear upon the matter.”

⁴⁹⁵“But when will that be?”

⁴⁹⁶“The time has come. ⁴⁹⁷You will now be present at the last scene of a remarkable little drama.”

⁴⁹⁸There was a sound upon the stairs, and our door was opened to admit as fine a specimen of manhood as ever passed through it. ⁴⁹⁹He was a very tall young man, golden-moustached, blue-eyed, with a skin which had been burned by tropical suns, and a springy step which showed that the huge frame was as active as it was strong. ⁵⁰⁰He closed the door behind him, and then he stood with clenched hands and heaving breast, choking down some overmastering emotion.

⁵⁰¹“Sit down, Captain Croker. ⁵⁰²You got my telegram?”

⁵⁰³Our visitor sank into an arm-chair and looked from one to the other of us with questioning eyes.

⁵⁰⁴“I got your telegram, and I came at the hour you said. ⁵⁰⁵I heard that you had been down to the office.

⁵⁰⁶There was no getting away from you. ⁵⁰⁷Let's hear the worst. ⁵⁰⁸What are you going to do with me?

⁵⁰⁹Arrest me? ⁵¹⁰Speak out, man! ⁵¹¹You can't sit there and play with me like a cat with a mouse.”

⁵¹²“Give him a cigar,” said Holmes. ⁵¹³“Bite on that, Captain Croker, and don't let your nerves run away with you. ⁵¹⁴I should not sit here smoking with you if I thought that you were a common criminal, you may be sure of that. ⁵¹⁵Be frank with me, and we may do some good. ⁵¹⁶Play tricks with me, and I'll crush you.”

⁵¹⁷“What do you wish me to do?”

⁵¹⁸“To give me a true account of all that happened at the Abbey Grange last night—a true account, mind you, with nothing added and nothing taken off. ⁵¹⁹I know so much already that if you go one inch off the straight I'll blow this police whistle from my window and the affair goes out of my hands for ever.”

⁵²⁰The sailor thought for a little. ⁵²¹Then he struck his leg with his great, sun-burned hand.

⁵²²“I'll chance it,” he cried. ⁵²³“I believe you are a man of your word, and a white man, and I'll tell you the whole story. ⁵²⁴But one thing I will say first. ⁵²⁵So far as I am concerned I regret nothing and I fear nothing, and I would do it all again and be proud of the job. ⁵²⁶Curse the beast, if he had as many lives as a cat he would owe them all to me! ⁵²⁷But it's the lady, Mary—Mary Fraser—for never will I call her by that accursed name. ⁵²⁸When I think of getting her into trouble, I who would give my life just to bring one smile to her dear face, it's that that turns my soul into water. ⁵²⁹And yet—and yet—what less could I do? ⁵³⁰I'll tell you my story, gentlemen, and then I'll ask you as man to man what less could I do.

⁵³¹“I must go back a bit. ⁵³²You seem to know everything, so I expect that you know that I met her when she was a passenger and I was first officer of the Rock of Gibraltar. ⁵³³From the first day I met her she was the only woman to me. ⁵³⁴Every day of that voyage I loved her more, and many a time since have I kneeled down in the darkness of the night watch and kissed the deck of that ship because I knew her dear feet had trod it. ⁵³⁵She was never engaged to me. ⁵³⁶She treated me as fairly as ever a woman treated

a man. ⁵³⁷I have no complaint to make. ⁵³⁸It was all love on my side, and all good comradeship and friendship on hers. ⁵³⁹When we parted she was a free woman, but I could never again be a free man.

⁵⁴⁰“Next time I came back from sea I heard of her marriage. ⁵⁴¹Well, why shouldn't she marry whom she liked? ⁵⁴²Title and money—who could carry them better than she? ⁵⁴³She was born for all that is beautiful and dainty. ⁵⁴⁴I didn't grieve over her marriage. ⁵⁴⁵I was not such a selfish hound as that. ⁵⁴⁶I just rejoiced that good luck had come her way, and that she had not thrown herself away on a penniless sailor. ⁵⁴⁷That's how I loved Mary Fraser.

⁵⁴⁸“Well, I never thought to see her again; but last voyage I was promoted, and the new boat was not yet launched, so I had to wait for a couple of months with my people at Sydenham. ⁵⁴⁹One day out in a country lane I met Theresa Wright, her old maid. ⁵⁵⁰She told me about her, about him, about everything. ⁵⁵¹I tell you, gentlemen, it nearly drove me mad. ⁵⁵²This drunken hound, that he should dare to raise his hand to her whose boots he was not worthy to lick! ⁵⁵³I met Theresa again. ⁵⁵⁴Then I met Mary herself—and met her again. ⁵⁵⁵Then she would meet me no more. ⁵⁵⁶But the other day I had a notice that I was to start on my voyage within a week, and I determined that I would see her once before I left. ⁵⁵⁷Theresa was always my friend, for she loved Mary and hated this villain almost as much as I did. ⁵⁵⁸From her I learned the ways of the house. ⁵⁵⁹Mary used to sit up reading in her own little room downstairs. ⁵⁶⁰I crept round there last night and scratched at the window. ⁵⁶¹At first she would not open to me, but in her heart I know that now she loves me, and she could not leave me in the frosty night. ⁵⁶²She whispered to me to come round to the big front window, and I found it open before me so as to let me into the dining-room. ⁵⁶³Again I heard from her own lips things that made my blood boil, and again I cursed this brute who mishandled the woman that I loved. ⁵⁶⁴Well, gentlemen, I was standing with her just inside the window, in all innocence, as Heaven is my judge, when he rushed like a madman into the room, called her the vilest name that a man could use to a woman, and welted her across the face with the stick he had in his hand. ⁵⁶⁵I had sprung for the poker, and it was a fair fight between us. ⁵⁶⁶See here on my arm where his first blow fell. ⁵⁶⁷Then it was my turn, and I went through him as if he had been a rotten pumpkin. ⁵⁶⁸Do you think I was sorry? ⁵⁶⁹Not I! ⁵⁷⁰It was his life or mine, but far more than that it was his life or hers, for how could I leave her in the power of this madman? ⁵⁷¹That was how I killed him. ⁵⁷²Was I wrong? ⁵⁷³Well, then, what would either of you gentlemen have done if you had been in my position?

⁵⁷⁴“She had screamed when he struck her, and that brought old Theresa down from the room above. ⁵⁷⁵There was a bottle of wine on the sideboard, and I opened it and poured a little between Mary's lips, for she was half dead with the shock. ⁵⁷⁶Then I took a drop myself. ⁵⁷⁷Theresa was as cool as ice, and it was her plot as much as mine. ⁵⁷⁸We must make it appear that burglars had done the thing. ⁵⁷⁹Theresa kept on repeating our story to her mistress, while I swarmed up and cut the rope of the bell. ⁵⁸⁰Then I lashed her in her chair, and frayed out the end of the rope to make it look natural, else they would wonder how in the world a burglar could have got up there to cut it. ⁵⁸¹Then I gathered up a few plates and pots of silver, to carry out the idea of a robbery, and there I left them with orders to give the alarm when I had a quarter of an hour's start. ⁵⁸²I dropped the silver into the pond and made off for Sydenham, feeling that for once in my life I had done a real good night's work. ⁵⁸³And that's the truth and the whole truth, Mr. Holmes, if it costs me my neck.”

⁵⁸⁴Holmes smoked for some time in silence. ⁵⁸⁵Then he crossed the room and shook our visitor by the hand.

⁵⁸⁶“That's what I think,” said he. ⁵⁸⁷“I know that every word is true, for you have hardly said a word which I did not know. ⁵⁸⁸No one but an acrobat or a sailor could have got up to that bell-rope from the bracket, and no one but a sailor could have made the knots with which the cord was fastened to the chair. ⁵⁸⁹Only once had this lady been brought into contact with sailors, and that was on her voyage, and it was someone of her own class of life, since she was trying hard to shield him and so showing that

she loved him. ⁵⁹⁰You see how easy it was for me to lay my hands upon you when once I had started upon the right trail.”

⁵⁹¹“I thought the police never could have seen through our dodge.”

⁵⁹²“And the police haven't; nor will they, to the best of my belief. ⁵⁹³Now, look here, Captain Croker, this is a very serious matter, though I am willing to admit that you acted under the most extreme provocation to which any man could be subjected. ⁵⁹⁴I am not sure that in defence of your own life your action will not be pronounced legitimate. ⁵⁹⁵However, that is for a British jury to decide. ⁵⁹⁶Meanwhile I have so much sympathy for you that if you choose to disappear in the next twenty-four hours I will promise you that no one will hinder you.”

⁵⁹⁷“And then it will all come out?”

⁵⁹⁸“Certainly it will come out.”

⁵⁹⁹The sailor flushed with anger.

⁶⁰⁰“What sort of proposal is that to make a man? ⁶⁰¹I know enough of law to understand that Mary would be had as accomplice. ⁶⁰²Do you think I would leave her alone to face the music while I slunk away? ⁶⁰³No, sir; let them do their worst upon me, but for Heaven's sake, Mr. Holmes, find some way of keeping my poor Mary out of the courts.”

⁶⁰⁴Holmes for a second time held out his hand to the sailor.

⁶⁰⁵“I was only testing you, and you ring true every time. ⁶⁰⁶Well, it is a great responsibility that I take upon myself, but I have given Hopkins an excellent hint, and if he can't avail himself of it I can do no more. ⁶⁰⁷See here, Captain Croker, we'll do this in due form of law. ⁶⁰⁸You are the prisoner. ⁶⁰⁹Watson, you are a British jury, and I never met a man who was more eminently fitted to represent one. ⁶¹⁰I am the judge. ⁶¹¹Now, gentleman of the jury, you have heard the evidence. ⁶¹²Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?”

⁶¹³“Not guilty, my lord,” said I.

⁶¹⁴“Vox populi, vox Dei. ⁶¹⁵You are acquitted, Captain Croker. ⁶¹⁶So long as the law does not find some other victim you are safe from me. ⁶¹⁷Come back to this lady in a year, and may her future and yours justify us in the judgment which we have pronounced this night.”

The Adventure of the Second Stain

¹I had intended “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange” to be the last of those exploits of my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, which I should ever communicate to the public. ²This resolution of mine was not due to any lack of material, since I have notes of many hundreds of cases to which I have never alluded, nor was it caused by any waning interest on the part of my readers in the singular personality and unique methods of this remarkable man. ³The real reason lay in the reluctance which Mr. Holmes has shown to the continued publication of his experiences. ⁴So long as he was in actual professional practice the records of his successes were of some practical value to him; but since he has definitely retired from London and betaken himself to study and bee-farming on the Sussex Downs, notoriety has become hateful to him, and he has peremptorily requested that his wishes in this matter should be strictly observed. ⁵It was only upon my representing to him that I had given a promise that “The Adventure of the Second Stain” should be published when the times were ripe, and pointing out to him that it is only appropriate that this long series of episodes should culminate in the most important international case which he has ever been called upon to handle, that I at last succeeded in obtaining his consent that a carefully-guarded account of the incident should at last be laid before the public. ⁶If in telling the story I seem to be somewhat vague in certain details the public will readily understand that there is an excellent reason for my reticence.

⁷It was, then, in a year, and even in a decade, that shall be nameless, that upon one Tuesday morning in autumn we found two visitors of European fame within the walls of our humble room in Baker Street. ⁸The one, austere, high-nosed, eagle-eyed, and dominant, was none other than the illustrious Lord Bellinger, twice Premier of Britain. ⁹The other, dark, clear-cut, and elegant, hardly yet of middle age, and endowed with every beauty of body and of mind, was the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs, and the most rising statesman in the country. ¹⁰They sat side by side upon our paper-littered settee, and it was easy to see from their worn and anxious faces that it was business of the most pressing importance which had brought them. ¹¹The Premier's thin, blue-veined hands were clasped tightly over the ivory head of his umbrella, and his gaunt, ascetic face looked gloomily from Holmes to me. ¹²The European Secretary pulled nervously at his moustache and fidgeted with the seals of his watch-chain.

¹³“When I discovered my loss, Mr. Holmes, which was at eight o'clock this morning, I at once informed the Prime Minister. ¹⁴It was at his suggestion that we have both come to you.”

¹⁵“Have you informed the police?”

¹⁶“No, sir,” said the Prime Minister, with the quick, decisive manner for which he was famous. ¹⁷“We have not done so, nor is it possible that we should do so. ¹⁸To inform the police must, in the long run, mean to inform the public. ¹⁹This is what we particularly desire to avoid.”

²⁰“And why, sir?”

²¹“Because the document in question is of such immense importance that its publication might very easily—I might almost say probably—lead to European complications of the utmost moment. ²²It is not too much to say that peace or war may hang upon the issue. ²³Unless its recovery can be attended with the utmost secrecy, then it may as well not be recovered at all, for all that is aimed at by those who have taken it is that its contents should be generally known.”

²⁴“I understand. ²⁵Now, Mr. Trelawney Hope, I should be much obliged if you would tell me exactly the circumstances under which this document disappeared.”

²⁶“That can be done in a very few words, Mr. Holmes. ²⁷The letter—for it was a letter from a foreign potentate—was received six days ago. ²⁸It was of such importance that I have never left it in my safe, but I have taken it across each evening to my house in Whitehall Terrace, and kept it in my bedroom in a locked despatch-box. ²⁹It was there last night. ³⁰Of that I am certain. ³¹I actually opened the box while I was dressing for dinner, and saw the document inside. ³²This morning it was gone. ³³The despatch-box had stood beside the glass upon my dressing-table all night. ³⁴I am a light sleeper, and so is my wife. ³⁵We are both prepared to swear that no one could have entered the room during the night. ³⁶And yet I repeat that the paper is gone.”

³⁷“What time did you dine?”

³⁸“Half-past seven.”

³⁹“How long was it before you went to bed?”

⁴⁰“My wife had gone to the theatre. ⁴¹I waited up for her. ⁴²It was half-past eleven before we went to our room.”

⁴³“Then for four hours the despatch-box had lain unguarded?”

⁴⁴“No one is ever permitted to enter that room save the housemaid in the morning, and my valet, or my wife's maid, during the rest of the day. ⁴⁵They are both trusty servants who have been with us for some time. ⁴⁶Besides, neither of them could possibly have known that there was anything more valuable than the ordinary departmental papers in my despatch-box.”

⁴⁷“Who did know of the existence of that letter?”

⁴⁸“No one in the house.”

⁴⁹“Surely your wife knew?”

⁵⁰“No, sir; I had said nothing to my wife until I missed the paper this morning.”

⁵¹The Premier nodded approvingly.

⁵²“I have long known, sir, how high is your sense of public duty,” said he. ⁵³“I am convinced that in the case of a secret of this importance it would rise superior to the most intimate domestic ties.”

⁵⁴The European Secretary bowed.

⁵⁵“You do me no more than justice, sir. ⁵⁶Until this morning I have never breathed one word to my wife upon this matter.”

⁵⁷“Could she have guessed?”

⁵⁸“No, Mr. Holmes, she could not have guessed—nor could anyone have guessed.”

⁵⁹“Have you lost any documents before?”

⁶⁰“No, sir.”

⁶¹“Who is there in England who did know of the existence of this letter?”

⁶²“Each member of the Cabinet was informed of it yesterday; but the pledge of secrecy which attends every Cabinet meeting was increased by the solemn warning which was given by the Prime Minister.

⁶³Good heavens, to think that within a few hours I should myself have lost it!” ⁶⁴His handsome face was distorted with a spasm of despair, and his hands tore at his hair. ⁶⁵For a moment we caught a glimpse of the natural man, impulsive, ardent, keenly sensitive. ⁶⁶The next the aristocratic mask was replaced, and the gentle voice had returned. ⁶⁷“Besides the members of the Cabinet there are two, or possibly

three, departmental officials who know of the letter. ⁶⁸No one else in England, Mr. Holmes, I assure you.”

⁶⁹“But abroad?”

⁷⁰“I believe that no one abroad has seen it save the man who wrote it. ⁷¹I am well convinced that his Ministers—that the usual official channels have not been employed.”

⁷²Holmes considered for some little time.

⁷³“Now, sir, I must ask you more particularly what this document is, and why its disappearance should have such momentous consequences?”

⁷⁴The two statesmen exchanged a quick glance and the Premier's shaggy eyebrows gathered in a frown.

⁷⁵“Mr. Holmes, the envelope is a long, thin one of pale blue colour. ⁷⁶There is a seal of red wax stamped with a crouching lion. ⁷⁷It is addressed in large, bold handwriting to—”

⁷⁸“I fear, sir,” said Holmes, “that, interesting and indeed essential as these details are, my inquiries must go more to the root of things. ⁷⁹What was the letter?”

⁸⁰“That is a State secret of the utmost importance, and I fear that I cannot tell you, nor do I see that it is necessary. ⁸¹If by the aid of the powers which you are said to possess you can find such an envelope as I describe with its enclosure, you will have deserved well of your country, and earned any reward which it lies in our power to bestow.”

⁸²Sherlock Holmes rose with a smile.

⁸³“You are two of the most busy men in the country,” said he, “and in my own small way I have also a good many calls upon me. ⁸⁴I regret exceedingly that I cannot help you in this matter, and any continuation of this interview would be a waste of time.”

⁸⁵The Premier sprang to his feet with that quick, fierce gleam of his deep-set eyes before which a Cabinet has cowered. ⁸⁶“I am not accustomed, sir—” he began, but mastered his anger and resumed his seat.

⁸⁷For a minute or more we all sat in silence. ⁸⁸Then the old statesman shrugged his shoulders.

⁸⁹“We must accept your terms, Mr. Holmes. ⁹⁰No doubt you are right, and it is unreasonable for us to expect you to act unless we give you our entire confidence.”

⁹¹“I agree with you, sir,” said the younger statesman.

⁹²“Then I will tell you, relying entirely upon your honour and that of your colleague, Dr. Watson. ⁹³I may appeal to your patriotism also, for I could not imagine a greater misfortune for the country than that this affair should come out.”

⁹⁴“You may safely trust us.”

⁹⁵“The letter, then, is from a certain foreign potentate who has been ruffled by some recent Colonial developments of this country. ⁹⁶It has been written hurriedly and upon his own responsibility entirely.

⁹⁷Inquiries have shown that his Ministers know nothing of the matter. ⁹⁸At the same time it is couched in so unfortunate a manner, and certain phrases in it are of so provocative a character, that its publication would undoubtedly lead to a most dangerous state of feeling in this country. ⁹⁹There would be such a ferment, sir, that I do not hesitate to say that within a week of the publication of that letter this country would be involved in a great war.”

¹⁰⁰Holmes wrote a name upon a slip of paper and handed it to the Premier.

¹⁰¹“Exactly. ¹⁰²It was he. ¹⁰³And it is this letter—this letter which may well mean the expenditure of a thousand millions and the lives of a hundred thousand men—which has become lost in this unaccountable fashion.”

¹⁰⁴“Have you informed the sender?”

¹⁰⁵“Yes, sir, a cipher telegram has been despatched.”

¹⁰⁶“Perhaps he desires the publication of the letter.”

¹⁰⁷“No, sir, we have strong reason to believe that he already understands that he has acted in an indiscreet and hot-headed manner. ¹⁰⁸It would be a greater blow to him and to his country than to us if this letter were to come out.”

¹⁰⁹“If this is so, whose interest is it that the letter should come out? ¹¹⁰Why should anyone desire to steal it or to publish it?”

¹¹¹“There, Mr. Holmes, you take me into regions of high international politics. ¹¹²But if you consider the European situation you will have no difficulty in perceiving the motive. ¹¹³The whole of Europe is an armed camp. ¹¹⁴There is a double league which makes a fair balance of military power. ¹¹⁵Great Britain holds the scales. ¹¹⁶If Britain were driven into war with one confederacy, it would assure the supremacy of the other confederacy, whether they joined in the war or not. ¹¹⁷Do you follow?”

¹¹⁸“Very clearly. ¹¹⁹It is then the interest of the enemies of this potentate to secure and publish this letter, so as to make a breach between his country and ours?”

¹²⁰“Yes, sir.”

¹²¹“And to whom would this document be sent if it fell into the hands of an enemy?”

¹²²“To any of the great Chancelleries of Europe. ¹²³It is probably speeding on its way thither at the present instant as fast as steam can take it.”

¹²⁴Mr. Trelawney Hope dropped his head on his chest and groaned aloud. ¹²⁵The Premier placed his hand kindly upon his shoulder.

¹²⁶“It is your misfortune, my dear fellow. ¹²⁷No one can blame you. ¹²⁸There is no precaution which you have neglected. ¹²⁹Now, Mr. Holmes, you are in full possession of the facts. ¹³⁰What course do you recommend?”

¹³¹Holmes shook his head mournfully.

¹³²“You think, sir, that unless this document is recovered there will be war?”

¹³³“I think it is very probable.”

¹³⁴“Then, sir, prepare for war.”

¹³⁵“That is a hard saying, Mr. Holmes.”

¹³⁶“Consider the facts, sir. ¹³⁷It is inconceivable that it was taken after eleven-thirty at night, since I understand that Mr. Hope and his wife were both in the room from that hour until the loss was found out. ¹³⁸It was taken, then, yesterday evening between seven-thirty and eleven-thirty, probably near the earlier hour, since whoever took it evidently knew that it was there and would naturally secure it as early as possible. ¹³⁹Now, sir, if a document of this importance were taken at that hour, where can it be now? ¹⁴⁰No one has any reason to retain it. ¹⁴¹It has been passed rapidly on to those who need it. ¹⁴²What chance have we now to overtake or even to trace it? ¹⁴³It is beyond our reach.”

¹⁴⁴The Prime Minister rose from the settee.

¹⁴⁵“What you say is perfectly logical, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁴⁶I feel that the matter is indeed out of our hands.”

¹⁴⁷“Let us presume, for argument's sake, that the document was taken by the maid or by the valet—”

¹⁴⁸“They are both old and tried servants.”

¹⁴⁹“I understand you to say that your room is on the second floor, that there is no entrance from without, and that from within no one could go up unobserved. ¹⁵⁰It must, then, be somebody in the house who has taken it. ¹⁵¹To whom would the thief take it? ¹⁵²To one of several international spies and secret agents, whose names are tolerably familiar to me. ¹⁵³There are three who may be said to be the heads of their profession. ¹⁵⁴I will begin my research by going round and finding if each of them is at his post. ¹⁵⁵If one is missing—especially if he has disappeared since last night—we will have some indication as to where the document has gone.”

¹⁵⁶“Why should he be missing?” asked the European Secretary. ¹⁵⁷“He would take the letter to an Embassy in London, as likely as not.”

¹⁵⁸“I fancy not. ¹⁵⁹These agents work independently, and their relations with the Embassies are often strained.”

¹⁶⁰The Prime Minister nodded his acquiescence.

¹⁶¹“I believe you are right, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁶²He would take so valuable a prize to head-quarters with his own hands. ¹⁶³I think that your course of action is an excellent one. ¹⁶⁴Meanwhile, Hope, we cannot neglect all our other duties on account of this one misfortune. ¹⁶⁵Should there be any fresh developments during the day we shall communicate with you, and you will no doubt let us know the results of your own inquiries.”

¹⁶⁶The two statesmen bowed and walked gravely from the room.

¹⁶⁷When our illustrious visitors had departed Holmes lit his pipe in silence, and sat for some time lost in the deepest thought. ¹⁶⁸I had opened the morning paper and was immersed in a sensational crime which had occurred in London the night before, when my friend gave an exclamation, sprang to his feet, and laid his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

¹⁶⁹“Yes,” said he, “there is no better way of approaching it. ¹⁷⁰The situation is desperate, but not hopeless. ¹⁷¹Even now, if we could be sure which of them has taken it, it is just possible that it has not yet passed out of his hands. ¹⁷²After all, it is a question of money with these fellows, and I have the British Treasury behind me. ¹⁷³If it's on the market I'll buy it—if it means another penny on the income-tax. ¹⁷⁴It is conceivable that the fellow might hold it back to see what bids come from this side before he tries his luck on the other. ¹⁷⁵There are only those three capable of playing so bold a game; there are Oberstein, La Rothiere, and Eduardo Lucas. ¹⁷⁶I will see each of them.”

¹⁷⁷I glanced at my morning paper.

¹⁷⁸“Is that Eduardo Lucas of Godolphin Street?”

¹⁷⁹“Yes.”

¹⁸⁰“You will not see him.”

¹⁸¹“Why not?”

¹⁸²“He was murdered in his house last night.”

¹⁸³My friend has so often astonished me in the course of our adventures that it was with a sense of exultation that I realized how completely I had astonished him. ¹⁸⁴He stared in amazement, and then

snatched the paper from my hands. ¹⁸⁵This was the paragraph which I had been engaged in reading when he rose from his chair:

¹⁸⁶Murder in Westminster

¹⁸⁷A crime of mysterious character was committed last night at 16, Godolphin Street, one of the old-fashioned and secluded rows of eighteenth-century houses which lie between the river and the Abbey, almost in the shadow of the great Tower of the Houses of Parliament. ¹⁸⁸This small but select mansion has been inhabited for some years by Mr. Eduardo Lucas, well known in society circles both on account of his charming personality and because he has the well-deserved reputation of being one of the best amateur tenors in the country. ¹⁸⁹Mr. Lucas is an unmarried man, thirty-four years of age, and his establishment consists of Mrs. Pringle, an elderly housekeeper, and of Mitton, his valet. ¹⁹⁰The former retires early and sleeps at the top of the house. ¹⁹¹The valet was out for the evening, visiting a friend at Hammersmith. ¹⁹²From ten o'clock onwards Mr. Lucas had the house to himself. ¹⁹³What occurred during that time has not yet transpired, but at a quarter to twelve Police-constable Barrett, passing along Godolphin Street, observed that the door of No. 16 was ajar. ¹⁹⁴He knocked, but received no answer. ¹⁹⁵Perceiving a light in the front room he advanced into the passage and again knocked, but without reply. ¹⁹⁶He then pushed open the door and entered. ¹⁹⁷The room was in a state of wild disorder, the furniture being all swept to one side, and one chair lying on its back in the centre. ¹⁹⁸Beside this chair, and still grasping one of its legs, lay the unfortunate tenant of the house. ¹⁹⁹He had been stabbed to the heart and must have died instantly. ²⁰⁰The knife with which the crime had been committed was a curved Indian dagger, plucked down from a trophy of Oriental arms which adorned one of the walls. ²⁰¹Robbery does not appear to have been the motive of the crime, for there had been no attempt to remove the valuable contents of the room. ²⁰²Mr. Eduardo Lucas was so well known and popular that his violent and mysterious fate will arouse painful interest and intense sympathy in a wide-spread circle of friends.

²⁰³"Well, Watson, what do you make of this?" asked Holmes, after a long pause.

²⁰⁴"It is an amazing coincidence."

²⁰⁵"A coincidence! ²⁰⁶Here is one of the three men whom we had named as possible actors in this drama, and he meets a violent death during the very hours when we know that that drama was being enacted. ²⁰⁷The odds are enormous against its being coincidence. ²⁰⁸No figures could express them. ²⁰⁹No, my dear Watson, the two events are connected—must be connected. ²¹⁰It is for us to find the connection."

²¹¹"But now the official police must know all."

²¹²"Not at all. ²¹³They know all they see at Godolphin Street. ²¹⁴They know—and shall know—nothing of Whitehall Terrace. ²¹⁵Only we know of both events, and can trace the relation between them. ²¹⁶There is one obvious point which would, in any case, have turned my suspicions against Lucas. ²¹⁷Godolphin Street, Westminster, is only a few minutes' walk from Whitehall Terrace. ²¹⁸The other secret agents whom I have named live in the extreme West-end. ²¹⁹It was easier, therefore, for Lucas than for the others to establish a connection or receive a message from the European Secretary's household—a small thing, and yet where events are compressed into a few hours it may prove essential. ²²⁰Halloa! what have we here?"

²²¹Mrs. Hudson had appeared with a lady's card upon her salver. ²²²Holmes glanced at it, raised his eyebrows, and handed it over to me.

²²³"Ask Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope if she will be kind enough to step up," said he.

²²⁴A moment later our modest apartment, already so distinguished that morning, was further honoured by the entrance of the most lovely woman in London. ²²⁵I had often heard of the beauty of the youngest daughter of the Duke of Belminster, but no description of it, and no contemplation of colourless photographs, had prepared me for the subtle, delicate charm and the beautiful colouring of that exquisite

head. ²²⁶And yet as we saw it that autumn morning, it was not its beauty which would be the first thing to impress the observer. ²²⁷The cheek was lovely, but it was paled with emotion; the eyes were bright, but it was the brightness of fever; the sensitive mouth was tight and drawn in an effort after self-command. ²²⁸Terror—not beauty—was what sprang first to the eye as our fair visitor stood framed for an instant in the open door.

²²⁹“Has my husband been here, Mr. Holmes?”

²³⁰“Yes, madam, he has been here.”

²³¹“Mr. Holmes, I implore you not to tell him that I came here.” ²³²Holmes bowed coldly, and motioned the lady to a chair.

²³³“Your ladyship places me in a very delicate position. ²³⁴I beg that you will sit down and tell me what you desire; but I fear that I cannot make any unconditional promise.”

²³⁵She swept across the room and seated herself with her back to the window. ²³⁶It was a queenly presence—tall, graceful, and intensely womanly.

²³⁷“Mr. Holmes,” she said, and her white-gloved hands clasped and unclasped as she spoke—“I will speak frankly to you in the hope that it may induce you to speak frankly in return. ²³⁸There is complete confidence between my husband and me on all matters save one. ²³⁹That one is politics. ²⁴⁰On this his lips are sealed. ²⁴¹He tells me nothing. ²⁴²Now, I am aware that there was a most deplorable occurrence in our house last night. ²⁴³I know that a paper has disappeared. ²⁴⁴But because the matter is political my husband refuses to take me into his complete confidence. ²⁴⁵Now it is essential—essential, I say—that I should thoroughly understand it. ²⁴⁶You are the only other person, save only these politicians, who knows the true facts. ²⁴⁷I beg you, then, Mr. Holmes, to tell me exactly what has happened and what it will lead to. ²⁴⁸Tell me all, Mr. Holmes. ²⁴⁹Let no regard for your client's interests keep you silent, for I assure you that his interests, if he would only see it, would be best served by taking me into his complete confidence. ²⁵⁰What was this paper which was stolen?”

²⁵¹“Madam, what you ask me is really impossible.”

²⁵²She groaned and sank her face in her hands.

²⁵³“You must see that this is so, madam. ²⁵⁴If your husband thinks fit to keep you in the dark over this matter, is it for me, who has only learned the true facts under the pledge of professional secrecy, to tell what he has withheld? ²⁵⁵It is not fair to ask it. ²⁵⁶It is him whom you must ask.”

²⁵⁷“I have asked him. ²⁵⁸I come to you as a last resource. ²⁵⁹But without your telling me anything definite, Mr. Holmes, you may do a great service if you would enlighten me on one point.”

²⁶⁰“What is it, madam?”

²⁶¹“Is my husband's political career likely to suffer through this incident?”

²⁶²“Well, madam, unless it is set right it may certainly have a very unfortunate effect.”

²⁶³“Ah!” ²⁶⁴She drew in her breath sharply as one whose doubts are resolved.

²⁶⁵“One more question, Mr. Holmes. ²⁶⁶From an expression which my husband dropped in the first shock of this disaster I understood that terrible public consequences might arise from the loss of this document.”

²⁶⁷“If he said so, I certainly cannot deny it.”

²⁶⁸“Of what nature are they?”

²⁶⁹“Nay, madam, there again you ask me more than I can possibly answer.”

²⁷⁰“Then I will take up no more of your time. ²⁷¹I cannot blame you, Mr. Holmes, for having refused to speak more freely, and you on your side will not, I am sure, think the worse of me because I desire, even against his will, to share my husband's anxieties. ²⁷²Once more I beg that you will say nothing of my visit.” ²⁷³She looked back at us from the door, and I had a last impression of that beautiful haunted face, the startled eyes, and the drawn mouth. ²⁷⁴Then she was gone.

²⁷⁵“Now, Watson, the fair sex is your department,” said Holmes, with a smile, when the dwindling frou-frou of skirts had ended in the slam of the front door. ²⁷⁶“What was the fair lady's game? ²⁷⁷What did she really want?”

²⁷⁸“Surely her own statement is clear and her anxiety very natural.”

²⁷⁹“Hum! ²⁸⁰Think of her appearance, Watson—her manner, her suppressed excitement, her restlessness, her tenacity in asking questions. ²⁸¹Remember that she comes of a caste who do not lightly show emotion.”

²⁸²“She was certainly much moved.”

²⁸³“Remember also the curious earnestness with which she assured us that it was best for her husband that she should know all. ²⁸⁴What did she mean by that? ²⁸⁵And you must have observed, Watson, how she manoeuvred to have the light at her back. ²⁸⁶She did not wish us to read her expression.”

²⁸⁷“Yes; she chose the one chair in the room.”

²⁸⁸“And yet the motives of women are so inscrutable. ²⁸⁹You remember the woman at Margate whom I suspected for the same reason. ²⁹⁰No powder on her nose—that proved to be the correct solution. ²⁹¹How can you build on such a quicksand? ²⁹²Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling-tongs. ²⁹³Good morning, Watson.”

²⁹⁴“You are off?”

²⁹⁵“Yes; I will wile away the morning at Godolphin Street with our friends of the regular establishment. ²⁹⁶With Eduardo Lucas lies the solution of our problem, though I must admit that I have not an inkling as to what form it may take. ²⁹⁷It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts. ²⁹⁸Do you stay on guard, my good Watson, and receive any fresh visitors. ²⁹⁹I'll join you at lunch if I am able.”

³⁰⁰All that day and the next and the next Holmes was in a mood which his friends would call taciturn, and others morose. ³⁰¹He ran out and ran in, smoked incessantly, played snatches on his violin, sank into reveries, devoured sandwiches at irregular hours, and hardly answered the casual questions which I put to him. ³⁰²It was evident to me that things were not going well with him or his quest. ³⁰³He would say nothing of the case, and it was from the papers that I learned the particulars of the inquest, and the arrest with the subsequent release of John Mitton, the valet of the deceased. ³⁰⁴The coroner's jury brought in the obvious “Wilful Murder,” but the parties remained as unknown as ever. ³⁰⁵No motive was suggested. ³⁰⁶The room was full of articles of value, but none had been taken. ³⁰⁷The dead man's papers had not been tampered with. ³⁰⁸They were carefully examined, and showed that he was a keen student of international politics, an indefatigable gossip, a remarkable linguist, and an untiring letter-writer. ³⁰⁹He had been on intimate terms with the leading politicians of several countries. ³¹⁰But nothing sensational was discovered among the documents which filled his drawers. ³¹¹As to his relations with women, they appeared to have been promiscuous but superficial. ³¹²He had many acquaintances among them, but few friends, and no one whom he loved. ³¹³His habits were regular, his conduct inoffensive. ³¹⁴His death was an absolute mystery, and likely to remain so.

³¹⁵As to the arrest of John Mitton, the valet, it was a counsel of despair as an alternative to absolute inaction. ³¹⁶But no case could be sustained against him. ³¹⁷He had visited friends in Hammersmith that

night.³¹⁸ The alibi was complete.³¹⁹ It is true that he started home at an hour which should have brought him to Westminster before the time when the crime was discovered, but his own explanation that he had walked part of the way seemed probable enough in view of the fineness of the night.³²⁰ He had actually arrived at twelve o'clock, and appeared to be overwhelmed by the unexpected tragedy.³²¹ He had always been on good terms with his master.³²² Several of the dead man's possessions—notably a small case of razors—had been found in the valet's boxes, but he explained that they had been presents from the deceased, and the housekeeper was able to corroborate the story.³²³ Mitton had been in Lucas's employment for three years.³²⁴ It was noticeable that Lucas did not take Mitton on the Continent with him.³²⁵ Sometimes he visited Paris for three months on end, but Mitton was left in charge of the Godolphin Street house.³²⁶ As to the housekeeper, she had heard nothing on the night of the crime.³²⁷ If her master had a visitor he had himself admitted him.

³²⁸ So for three mornings the mystery remained, so far as I could follow it in the papers.³²⁹ If Holmes knew more he kept his own counsel, but, as he told me that Inspector Lestrade had taken him into his confidence in the case, I knew that he was in close touch with every development.³³⁰ Upon the fourth day there appeared a long telegram from Paris which seemed to solve the whole question.

³³¹ A discovery has just been made by the Parisian police [said the Daily Telegraph] which raises the veil which hung round the tragic fate of Mr. Eduardo Lucas, who met his death by violence last Monday night at Godolphin Street, Westminster.³³² Our readers will remember that the deceased gentleman was found stabbed in his room, and that some suspicion attached to his valet, but that the case broke down on an alibi.³³³ Yesterday a lady, who has been known as Mme. Henri Fournaye, occupying a small villa in the Rue Austerlitz, was reported to the authorities by her servants as being insane.³³⁴ An examination showed that she had indeed developed mania of a dangerous and permanent form.³³⁵ On inquiry the police have discovered that Mme. Henri Fournaye only returned from a journey to London on Tuesday last, and there is evidence to connect her with the crime at Westminster.³³⁶ A comparison of photographs has proved conclusively that M. Henri Fournaye and Eduardo Lucas were really one and the same person, and that the deceased had for some reason lived a double life in London and Paris.³³⁷ Mme. Fournaye, who is of Creole origin, is of an extremely excitable nature, and has suffered in the past from attacks of jealousy which have amounted to frenzy.³³⁸ It is conjectured that it was in one of these that she committed the terrible crime which has caused such a sensation in London.³³⁹ Her movements upon the Monday night have not yet been traced, but it is undoubted that a woman answering to her description attracted much attention at Charing Cross Station on Tuesday morning by the wildness of her appearance and the violence of her gestures.³⁴⁰ It is probable, therefore, that the crime was either committed when insane, or that its immediate effect was to drive the unhappy woman out of her mind.³⁴¹ At present she is unable to give any coherent account of the past, and the doctors hold out no hopes of the re-establishment of her reason.³⁴² There is evidence that a woman, who might have been Mme. Fournaye, was seen for some hours on Monday night watching the house in Godolphin Street.

³⁴³ "What do you think of that, Holmes?" ³⁴⁴ I had read the account aloud to him, while he finished his breakfast.

³⁴⁵ "My dear Watson," said he, as he rose from the table and paced up and down the room, "you are most long-suffering, but if I have told you nothing in the last three days it is because there is nothing to tell.³⁴⁶ Even now this report from Paris does not help us much."

³⁴⁷ "Surely it is final as regards the man's death."

³⁴⁸ "The man's death is a mere incident—a trivial episode—in comparison with our real task, which is to trace this document and save a European catastrophe.³⁴⁹ Only one important thing has happened in the last three days, and that is that nothing has happened.³⁵⁰ I get reports almost hourly from the Government, and it is certain that nowhere in Europe is there any sign of trouble.³⁵¹ Now, if this letter were loose—no, it can't be loose—but if it isn't loose, where can it be? ³⁵² Who has it? ³⁵³ Why is it held

back? ³⁵⁴That's the question that beats in my brain like a hammer. ³⁵⁵Was it, indeed, a coincidence that Lucas should meet his death on the night when the letter disappeared? ³⁵⁶Did the letter ever reach him? ³⁵⁷If so, why is it not among his papers? ³⁵⁸Did this mad wife of his carry it off with her? ³⁵⁹If so, is it in her house in Paris? ³⁶⁰How could I search for it without the French police having their suspicions aroused? ³⁶¹It is a case, my dear Watson, where the law is as dangerous to us as the criminals are. ³⁶²Every man's hand is against us, and yet the interests at stake are colossal. ³⁶³Should I bring it to a successful conclusion it will certainly represent the crowning glory of my career. ³⁶⁴Ah, here is my latest from the front!" ³⁶⁵He glanced hurriedly at the note which had been handed in. ³⁶⁶"Halloa! ³⁶⁷Lestrade seems to have observed something of interest. ³⁶⁸Put on your hat, Watson, and we will stroll down together to Westminster."

³⁶⁹It was my first visit to the scene of the crime—a high, dingy, narrow-chested house, prim, formal, and solid, like the century which gave it birth. ³⁷⁰Lestrade's bulldog features gazed out at us from the front window, and he greeted us warmly when a big constable had opened the door and let us in. ³⁷¹The room into which we were shown was that in which the crime had been committed, but no trace of it now remained, save an ugly, irregular stain upon the carpet. ³⁷²This carpet was a small square drugget in the centre of the room, surrounded by a broad expanse of beautiful, old-fashioned wood-flooring in square blocks highly polished. ³⁷³Over the fireplace was a magnificent trophy of weapons, one of which had been used on that tragic night. ³⁷⁴In the window was a sumptuous writing-desk, and every detail of the apartment, the pictures, the rugs, and the hangings, all pointed to a taste which was luxurious to the verge of effeminacy.

³⁷⁵"Seen the Paris news?" asked Lestrade.

³⁷⁶Holmes nodded.

³⁷⁷"Our French friends seem to have touched the spot this time. ³⁷⁸No doubt it's just as they say. ³⁷⁹She knocked at the door—surprise visit, I guess, for he kept his life in water-tight compartments. ³⁸⁰He let her in—couldn't keep her in the street. ³⁸¹She told him how she had traced him, reproached him, one thing led to another, and then with that dagger so handy the end soon came. ³⁸²It wasn't all done in an instant, though, for these chairs were all swept over yonder, and he had one in his hand as if he had tried to hold her off with it. ³⁸³We've got it all clear as if we had seen it."

³⁸⁴Holmes raised his eyebrows.

³⁸⁵"And yet you have sent for me?"

³⁸⁶"Ah, yes, that's another matter—a mere trifle, but the sort of thing you take an interest in—queer, you know, and what you might call freakish. ³⁸⁷It has nothing to do with the main fact—can't have, on the face of it."

³⁸⁸"What is it, then?"

³⁸⁹"Well, you know, after a crime of this sort we are very careful to keep things in their position. ³⁹⁰Nothing has been moved. ³⁹¹Officer in charge here day and night. ³⁹²This morning, as the man was buried and the investigation over—so far as this room is concerned—we thought we could tidy up a bit. ³⁹³This carpet. ³⁹⁴You see, it is not fastened down; only just laid there. ³⁹⁵We had occasion to raise it. ³⁹⁶We found—"

³⁹⁷"Yes? ³⁹⁸You found—"

³⁹⁹Holmes's face grew tense with anxiety.

⁴⁰⁰"Well, I'm sure you would never guess in a hundred years what we did find. ⁴⁰¹You see that stain on the carpet? ⁴⁰²Well, a great deal must have soaked through, must it not?"

⁴⁰³“Undoubtedly it must.”

⁴⁰⁴“Well, you will be surprised to hear that there is no stain on the white woodwork to correspond.”

⁴⁰⁵“No stain! ⁴⁰⁶But there must—”

⁴⁰⁷“Yes; so you would say. ⁴⁰⁸But the fact remains that there isn't.”

⁴⁰⁹He took the corner of the carpet in his hand and, turning it over, he showed that it was indeed as he said.

⁴¹⁰“But the underside is as stained as the upper. ⁴¹¹It must have left a mark.”

⁴¹²Lestrade chuckled with delight at having puzzled the famous expert.

⁴¹³“Now I'll show you the explanation. ⁴¹⁴There is a second stain, but it does not correspond with the other. ⁴¹⁵See for yourself.” ⁴¹⁶As he spoke he turned over another portion of the carpet, and there, sure enough, was a great crimson spill upon the square white facing of the old-fashioned floor. ⁴¹⁷“What do you make of that, Mr. Holmes?”

⁴¹⁸“Why, it is simple enough. ⁴¹⁹The two stains did correspond, but the carpet has been turned round. ⁴²⁰As it was square and unfastened it was easily done.”

⁴²¹“The official police don't need you, Mr. Holmes, to tell them that the carpet must have been turned round. ⁴²²That's clear enough, for the stains lie above each other—if you lay it over this way. ⁴²³But what I want to know is, who shifted the carpet, and why?”

⁴²⁴I could see from Holmes's rigid face that he was vibrating with inward excitement.

⁴²⁵“Look here, Lestrade,” said he, “has that constable in the passage been in charge of the place all the time?”

⁴²⁶“Yes, he has.”

⁴²⁷“Well, take my advice. ⁴²⁸Examine him carefully. ⁴²⁹Don't do it before us. ⁴³⁰We'll wait here. ⁴³¹You take him into the back room. ⁴³²You'll be more likely to get a confession out of him alone. ⁴³³Ask him how he dared to admit people and leave them alone in this room. ⁴³⁴Don't ask him if he has done it. ⁴³⁵Take it for granted. ⁴³⁶Tell him you know someone has been here. ⁴³⁷Press him. ⁴³⁸Tell him that a full confession is his only chance of forgiveness. ⁴³⁹Do exactly what I tell you!”

⁴⁴⁰“By George, if he knows I'll have it out of him!” cried Lestrade. ⁴⁴¹He darted into the hall, and a few moments later his bullying voice sounded from the back room.

⁴⁴²“Now, Watson, now!” cried Holmes, with frenzied eagerness. ⁴⁴³All the demoniacal force of the man masked behind that listless manner burst out in a paroxysm of energy. ⁴⁴⁴He tore the drugget from the floor, and in an instant was down on his hands and knees clawing at each of the squares of wood beneath it. ⁴⁴⁵One turned sideways as he dug his nails into the edge of it. ⁴⁴⁶It hinged back like the lid of a box. ⁴⁴⁷A small black cavity opened beneath it. ⁴⁴⁸Holmes plunged his eager hand into it, and drew it out with a bitter snarl of anger and disappointment. ⁴⁴⁹It was empty.

⁴⁵⁰“Quick, Watson, quick! ⁴⁵¹Get it back again!” ⁴⁵²The wooden lid was replaced, and the drugget had only just been drawn straight when Lestrade's voice was heard in the passage. ⁴⁵³He found Holmes leaning languidly against the mantelpiece, resigned and patient, endeavouring to conceal his irrepressible yawns.

⁴⁵⁴“Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁵⁵I can see that you are bored to death with the whole affair. ⁴⁵⁶Well, he has confessed, all right. ⁴⁵⁷Come in here, MacPherson. ⁴⁵⁸Let these gentlemen hear of your most inexcusable conduct.”

⁴⁵⁹The big constable, very hot and penitent, sidled into the room.

⁴⁶⁰“I meant no harm, sir, I’m sure. ⁴⁶¹The young woman came to the door last evening—mistook the house, she did. ⁴⁶²And then we got talking. ⁴⁶³It’s lonesome, when you’re on duty here all day.”

⁴⁶⁴“Well, what happened then?”

⁴⁶⁵“She wanted to see where the crime was done—had read about it in the papers, she said. ⁴⁶⁶She was a very respectable, well-spoken young woman, sir, and I saw no harm in letting her have a peep. ⁴⁶⁷When she saw that mark on the carpet, down she dropped on the floor, and lay as if she were dead. ⁴⁶⁸I ran to the back and got some water, but I could not bring her to. ⁴⁶⁹Then I went round the corner to the Ivy Plant for some brandy, and by the time I had brought it back the young woman had recovered and was off—ashamed of herself, I dare say, and dared not face me.”

⁴⁷⁰“How about moving that drugget?”

⁴⁷¹“Well, sir, it was a bit rumpled, certainly, when I came back. ⁴⁷²You see, she fell on it, and it lies on a polished floor with nothing to keep it in place. ⁴⁷³I straightened it out afterwards.”

⁴⁷⁴“It’s a lesson to you that you can’t deceive me, Constable MacPherson,” said Lestrade, with dignity.

⁴⁷⁵“No doubt you thought that your breach of duty could never be discovered, and yet a mere glance at that drugget was enough to convince me that someone had been admitted to the room. ⁴⁷⁶It’s lucky for you, my man, that nothing is missing, or you would find yourself in Queer Street. ⁴⁷⁷I’m sorry to have called you down over such a petty business, Mr. Holmes, but I thought the point of the second stain not corresponding with the first would interest you.”

⁴⁷⁸“Certainly, it was most interesting. ⁴⁷⁹Has this woman only been here once, constable?”

⁴⁸⁰“Yes, sir, only once.”

⁴⁸¹“Who was she?”

⁴⁸²“Don’t know the name, sir. ⁴⁸³Was answering an advertisement about type-writing, and came to the wrong number—very pleasant, genteel young woman, sir.”

⁴⁸⁴“Tall? ⁴⁸⁵Handsome?”

⁴⁸⁶“Yes, sir; she was a well-grown young woman. ⁴⁸⁷I suppose you might say she was handsome. ⁴⁸⁸Perhaps some would say she was very handsome. ⁴⁸⁹‘Oh, officer, do let me have a peep!’ says she. ⁴⁹⁰She had pretty, coaxing ways, as you might say, and I thought there was no harm in letting her just put her head through the door.”

⁴⁹¹“How was she dressed?”

⁴⁹²“Quiet, sir—a long mantle down to her feet.”

⁴⁹³“What time was it?”

⁴⁹⁴“It was just growing dusk at the time. ⁴⁹⁵They were lighting the lamps as I came back with the brandy.”

⁴⁹⁶“Very good,” said Holmes. ⁴⁹⁷“Come, Watson, I think that we have more important work elsewhere.”

⁴⁹⁸As we left the house Lestrade remained in the front room, while the repentant constable opened the door to let us out. ⁴⁹⁹Holmes turned on the step and held up something in his hand. ⁵⁰⁰The constable stared intently.

⁵⁰¹“Good Lord, sir!” he cried, with amazement on his face. ⁵⁰²Holmes put his finger on his lips, replaced his hand in his breast-pocket, and burst out laughing as we turned down the street. ⁵⁰³“Excellent!” said

he. ⁵⁰⁴“Come, friend Watson, the curtain rings up for the last act. ⁵⁰⁵You will be relieved to hear that there will be no war, that the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope will suffer no set-back in his brilliant career, that the indiscreet Sovereign will receive no punishment for his indiscretion, that the Prime Minister will have no European complication to deal with, and that with a little tact and management upon our part nobody will be a penny the worse for what might have been a very ugly incident.”

⁵⁰⁶My mind filled with admiration for this extraordinary man.

⁵⁰⁷“You have solved it!” I cried.

⁵⁰⁸“Hardly that, Watson. ⁵⁰⁹There are some points which are as dark as ever. ⁵¹⁰But we have so much that it will be our own fault if we cannot get the rest. ⁵¹¹We will go straight to Whitehall Terrace and bring the matter to a head.”

⁵¹²When we arrived at the residence of the European Secretary it was for Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope that Sherlock Holmes inquired. ⁵¹³We were shown into the morning-room.

⁵¹⁴“Mr. Holmes!” said the lady, and her face was pink with her indignation, “this is surely most unfair and ungenerous upon your part. ⁵¹⁵I desired, as I have explained, to keep my visit to you a secret, lest my husband should think that I was intruding into his affairs. ⁵¹⁶And yet you compromise me by coming here and so showing that there are business relations between us.”

⁵¹⁷“Unfortunately, madam, I had no possible alternative. ⁵¹⁸I have been commissioned to recover this immensely important paper. ⁵¹⁹I must therefore ask you, madam, to be kind enough to place it in my hands.”

⁵²⁰The lady sprang to her feet, with the colour all dashed in an instant from her beautiful face. ⁵²¹Her eyes glazed—she tottered—I thought that she would faint. ⁵²²Then with a grand effort she rallied from the shock, and a supreme astonishment and indignation chased every other expression from her features.

⁵²³“You—you insult me, Mr. Holmes.”

⁵²⁴“Come, come, madam, it is useless. ⁵²⁵Give up the letter.”

⁵²⁶She darted to the bell.

⁵²⁷“The butler shall show you out.”

⁵²⁸“Do not ring, Lady Hilda. ⁵²⁹If you do, then all my earnest efforts to avoid a scandal will be frustrated. ⁵³⁰Give up the letter and all will be set right. ⁵³¹If you will work with me I can arrange everything. ⁵³²If you work against me I must expose you.”

⁵³³She stood grandly defiant, a queenly figure, her eyes fixed upon his as if she would read his very soul. ⁵³⁴Her hand was on the bell, but she had forbore to ring it.

⁵³⁵“You are trying to frighten me. ⁵³⁶It is not a very manly thing, Mr. Holmes, to come here and browbeat a woman. ⁵³⁷You say that you know something. ⁵³⁸What is it that you know?”

⁵³⁹“Pray sit down, madam. ⁵⁴⁰You will hurt yourself there if you fall. ⁵⁴¹I will not speak until you sit down. ⁵⁴²Thank you.”

⁵⁴³“I give you five minutes, Mr. Holmes.”

⁵⁴⁴“One is enough, Lady Hilda. ⁵⁴⁵I know of your visit to Eduardo Lucas, of your giving him this document, of your ingenious return to the room last night, and of the manner in which you took the letter from the hiding-place under the carpet.”

⁵⁴⁶She stared at him with an ashen face and gulped twice before she could speak.

⁵⁴⁷“You are mad, Mr. Holmes—you are mad!” she cried, at last.

⁵⁴⁸He drew a small piece of cardboard from his pocket. ⁵⁴⁹It was the face of a woman cut out of a portrait.

⁵⁵⁰“I have carried this because I thought it might be useful,” said he. ⁵⁵¹“The policeman has recognised it.”

⁵⁵²She gave a gasp and her head dropped back in the chair.

⁵⁵³“Come, Lady Hilda. ⁵⁵⁴You have the letter. ⁵⁵⁵The matter may still be adjusted. ⁵⁵⁶I have no desire to bring trouble to you. ⁵⁵⁷My duty ends when I have returned the lost letter to your husband. ⁵⁵⁸Take my advice and be frank with me; it is your only chance.”

⁵⁵⁹Her courage was admirable. ⁵⁶⁰Even now she would not own defeat.

⁵⁶¹“I tell you again, Mr. Holmes, that you are under some absurd illusion.”

⁵⁶²Holmes rose from his chair.

⁵⁶³“I am sorry for you, Lady Hilda. I have done my best for you; I can see that it is all in vain.”

⁵⁶⁴He rang the bell. ⁵⁶⁵The butler entered.

⁵⁶⁶“Is Mr. Trelawney Hope at home?”

⁵⁶⁷“He will be home, sir, at a quarter to one.”

⁵⁶⁸Holmes glanced at his watch.

⁵⁶⁹“Still a quarter of an hour,” said he. ⁵⁷⁰“Very good, I shall wait.”

⁵⁷¹The butler had hardly closed the door behind him when Lady Hilda was down on her knees at Holmes's feet, her hands out-stretched, her beautiful face upturned and wet with her tears.

⁵⁷²“Oh, spare me, Mr. Holmes! ⁵⁷³Spare me!” she pleaded, in a frenzy of supplication. ⁵⁷⁴“For Heaven's sake, don't tell him! ⁵⁷⁵I love him so! ⁵⁷⁶I would not bring one shadow on his life, and this I know would break his noble heart.”

⁵⁷⁷Holmes raised the lady. ⁵⁷⁸“I am thankful, madam, that you have come to your senses even at this last moment! ⁵⁷⁹There is not an instant to lose. ⁵⁸⁰Where is the letter?”

⁵⁸¹She darted across to a writing-desk, unlocked it, and drew out a long blue envelope.

⁵⁸²“Here it is, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁸³Would to Heaven I had never seen it!”

⁵⁸⁴“How can we return it?” Holmes muttered. ⁵⁸⁵“Quick, quick, we must think of some way! ⁵⁸⁶Where is the despatch-box?”

⁵⁸⁷“Still in his bedroom.”

⁵⁸⁸“What a stroke of luck! ⁵⁸⁹Quick, madam, bring it here!”

⁵⁹⁰A moment later she had appeared with a red flat box in her hand.

⁵⁹¹“How did you open it before? ⁵⁹²You have a duplicate key? ⁵⁹³Yes, of course you have. ⁵⁹⁴Open it!”

⁵⁹⁵From out of her bosom Lady Hilda had drawn a small key. ⁵⁹⁶The box flew open. ⁵⁹⁷It was stuffed with papers. ⁵⁹⁸Holmes thrust the blue envelope deep down into the heart of them, between the leaves of some other document. ⁵⁹⁹The box was shut, locked, and returned to the bedroom.

⁶⁰⁰“Now we are ready for him,” said Holmes; “we have still ten minutes. ⁶⁰¹I am going far to screen you, Lady Hilda. ⁶⁰²In return you will spend the time in telling me frankly the real meaning of this extraordinary affair.”

⁶⁰³“Mr. Holmes, I will tell you everything,” cried the lady. ⁶⁰⁴“Oh, Mr. Holmes, I would cut off my right hand before I gave him a moment of sorrow! ⁶⁰⁵There is no woman in all London who loves her husband as I do, and yet if he knew how I have acted—how I have been compelled to act—he would never forgive me. ⁶⁰⁶For his own honour stands so high that he could not forget or pardon a lapse in another. ⁶⁰⁷Help me, Mr. Holmes! ⁶⁰⁸My happiness, his happiness, our very lives are at stake!”

⁶⁰⁹“Quick, madam, the time grows short!”

⁶¹⁰“It was a letter of mine, Mr. Holmes, an indiscreet letter written before my marriage—a foolish letter, a letter of an impulsive, loving girl. ⁶¹¹I meant no harm, and yet he would have thought it criminal. ⁶¹²Had he read that letter his confidence would have been for ever destroyed. ⁶¹³It is years since I wrote it. ⁶¹⁴I had thought that the whole matter was forgotten. ⁶¹⁵Then at last I heard from this man, Lucas, that it had passed into his hands, and that he would lay it before my husband. ⁶¹⁶I implored his mercy. ⁶¹⁷He said that he would return my letter if I would bring him a certain document which he described in my husband's despatch-box. ⁶¹⁸He had some spy in the office who had told him of its existence. ⁶¹⁹He assured me that no harm could come to my husband. ⁶²⁰Put yourself in my position, Mr. Holmes! ⁶²¹What was I to do?”

⁶²²“Take your husband into your confidence.”

⁶²³“I could not, Mr. Holmes, I could not! ⁶²⁴On the one side seemed certain ruin; on the other, terrible as it seemed to take my husband's paper, still in a matter of politics I could not understand the consequences, while in a matter of love and trust they were only too clear to me. ⁶²⁵I did it, Mr. Holmes! ⁶²⁶I took an impression of his key; this man Lucas furnished a duplicate. ⁶²⁷I opened his despatch-box, took the paper, and conveyed it to Godolphin Street.”

⁶²⁸“What happened there, madam?”

⁶²⁹“I tapped at the door as agreed. ⁶³⁰Lucas opened it. ⁶³¹I followed him into his room, leaving the hall door ajar behind me, for I feared to be alone with the man. ⁶³²I remember that there was a woman outside as I entered. ⁶³³Our business was soon done. ⁶³⁴He had my letter on his desk; I handed him the document. ⁶³⁵He gave me the letter. ⁶³⁶At this instant there was a sound at the door. ⁶³⁷There were steps in the passage. ⁶³⁸Lucas quickly turned back the drugget, thrust the document into some hiding-place there, and covered it over.

⁶³⁹“What happened after that is like some fearful dream. ⁶⁴⁰I have a vision of a dark, frantic face, of a woman's voice, which screamed in French, ‘My waiting is not in vain. ⁶⁴¹At last, at last I have found you with her!’ ⁶⁴²There was a savage struggle. ⁶⁴³I saw him with a chair in his hand, a knife gleamed in hers. ⁶⁴⁴I rushed from the horrible scene, ran from the house, and only next morning in the paper did I learn the dreadful result. ⁶⁴⁵That night I was happy, for I had my letter, and I had not seen yet what the future would bring.

⁶⁴⁶“It was the next morning that I realized that I had only exchanged one trouble for another. ⁶⁴⁷My husband's anguish at the loss of his paper went to my heart. ⁶⁴⁸I could hardly prevent myself from there and then kneeling down at his feet and telling him what I had done. ⁶⁴⁹But that again would mean a confession of the past. ⁶⁵⁰I came to you that morning in order to understand the full enormity of my offence. ⁶⁵¹From the instant that I grasped it my whole mind was turned to the one thought of getting back my husband's paper. ⁶⁵²It must still be where Lucas had placed it, for it was concealed before this dreadful woman entered the room. ⁶⁵³If it had not been for her coming, I should not have known where his hiding-place was. ⁶⁵⁴How was I to get into the room? ⁶⁵⁵For two days I watched the place, but the

door was never left open. ⁶⁵⁶Last night I made a last attempt. ⁶⁵⁷What I did and how I succeeded, you have already learned. ⁶⁵⁸I brought the paper back with me, and thought of destroying it since I could see no way of returning it, without confessing my guilt to my husband. ⁶⁵⁹Heavens, I hear his step upon the stair!"

⁶⁶⁰The European Secretary burst excitedly into the room.

⁶⁶¹"Any news, Mr. Holmes, any news?" he cried.

⁶⁶²"I have some hopes."

⁶⁶³"Ah, thank heaven!" ⁶⁶⁴His face became radiant. ⁶⁶⁵"The Prime Minister is lunching with me. ⁶⁶⁶May he share your hopes? ⁶⁶⁷He has nerves of steel, and yet I know that he has hardly slept since this terrible event. ⁶⁶⁸Jacobs, will you ask the Prime Minister to come up? ⁶⁶⁹As to you, dear, I fear that this is a matter of politics. ⁶⁷⁰We will join you in a few minutes in the dining-room."

⁶⁷¹The Prime Minister's manner was subdued, but I could see by the gleam of his eyes and the twitchings of his bony hands that he shared the excitement of his young colleague.

⁶⁷²"I understand that you have something to report, Mr. Holmes?"

⁶⁷³"Purely negative as yet," my friend answered. ⁶⁷⁴"I have inquired at every point where it might be, and I am sure that there is no danger to be apprehended."

⁶⁷⁵"But that is not enough, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁷⁶We cannot live for ever on such a volcano. ⁶⁷⁷We must have something definite."

⁶⁷⁸"I am in hopes of getting it. ⁶⁷⁹That is why I am here. ⁶⁸⁰The more I think of the matter the more convinced I am that the letter has never left this house."

⁶⁸¹"Mr. Holmes!"

⁶⁸²"If it had it would certainly have been public by now."

⁶⁸³"But why should anyone take it in order to keep it in his house?"

⁶⁸⁴"I am not convinced that anyone did take it."

⁶⁸⁵"Then how could it leave the despatch-box?"

⁶⁸⁶"I am not convinced that it ever did leave the despatch-box."

⁶⁸⁷"Mr. Holmes, this joking is very ill-timed. ⁶⁸⁸You have my assurance that it left the box."

⁶⁸⁹"Have you examined the box since Tuesday morning?"

⁶⁹⁰"No; it was not necessary."

⁶⁹¹"You may conceivably have overlooked it."

⁶⁹²"Impossible, I say."

⁶⁹³"But I am not convinced of it; I have known such things to happen. ⁶⁹⁴I presume there are other papers there. ⁶⁹⁵Well, it may have got mixed with them."

⁶⁹⁶"It was on the top."

⁶⁹⁷"Someone may have shaken the box and displaced it."

⁶⁹⁸"No, no; I had everything out."

⁶⁹⁹“Surely it is easily decided, Hope,” said the Premier. ⁷⁰⁰“Let us have the despatch-box brought in.”

⁷⁰¹The Secretary rang the bell.

⁷⁰²“Jacobs, bring down my despatch-box. ⁷⁰³This is a farcical waste of time, but still, if nothing else will satisfy you, it shall be done. ⁷⁰⁴Thank you, Jacobs; put it here. ⁷⁰⁵I have always had the key on my watch-chain. ⁷⁰⁶Here are the papers, you see. ⁷⁰⁷Letter from Lord Merrow, report from Sir Charles Hardy, memorandum from Belgrade, note on the Russo-German grain taxes, letter from Madrid, note from Lord Flowers—good heavens! what is this? ⁷⁰⁸Lord Bellinger! ⁷⁰⁹Lord Bellinger!”

⁷¹⁰The Premier snatched the blue envelope from his hand.

⁷¹¹“Yes, it is it—and the letter is intact. ⁷¹²Hope, I congratulate you.”

⁷¹³“Thank you! ⁷¹⁴Thank you! ⁷¹⁵What a weight from my heart. ⁷¹⁶But this is inconceivable—impossible.

⁷¹⁷Mr. Holmes, you are a wizard, a sorcerer! ⁷¹⁸How did you know it was there?”

⁷¹⁹“Because I knew it was nowhere else.”

⁷²⁰“I cannot believe my eyes!” ⁷²¹He ran wildly to the door. ⁷²²“Where is my wife? ⁷²³I must tell her that all is well. ⁷²⁴Hilda! ⁷²⁵Hilda!” we heard his voice on the stairs.

⁷²⁶The Premier looked at Holmes with twinkling eyes.

⁷²⁷“Come, sir,” said he. ⁷²⁸“There is more in this than meets the eye. ⁷²⁹How came the letter back in the box?”

⁷³⁰Holmes turned away smiling from the keen scrutiny of those wonderful eyes.

⁷³¹“We also have our diplomatic secrets,” said he, and picking up his hat he turned to the door.

His Last Bow

Preface

The friends of Mr. Sherlock Holmes will be glad to learn that he is still alive and well, though somewhat crippled by occasional attacks of rheumatism. He has, for many years, lived in a small farm upon the downs five miles from Eastbourne, where his time is divided between philosophy and agriculture. During this period of rest he has refused the most princely offers to take up various cases, having determined that his retirement was a permanent one. The approach of the German war caused him, however, to lay his remarkable combination of intellectual and practical activity at the disposal of the government, with historical results which are recounted in *His Last Bow*. Several previous experiences which have lain long in my portfolio have been added to *His Last Bow* so as to complete the volume.

John H. Watson, M. D.

The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge

Chapter I.

The Singular Experience of Mr. John Scott Eccles

¹I find it recorded in my notebook that it was a bleak and windy day towards the end of March in the year 1892. ²Holmes had received a telegram while we sat at our lunch, and he had scribbled a reply. ³He made no remark, but the matter remained in his thoughts, for he stood in front of the fire afterwards with a thoughtful face, smoking his pipe, and casting an occasional glance at the message. ⁴Suddenly he turned upon me with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

⁵"I suppose, Watson, we must look upon you as a man of letters," said he. ⁶"How do you define the word 'grotesque'?"

⁷"Strange—remarkable," I suggested.

⁸He shook his head at my definition.

⁹"There is surely something more than that," said he; "some underlying suggestion of the tragic and the terrible. ¹⁰If you cast your mind back to some of those narratives with which you have afflicted a long-suffering public, you will recognize how often the grotesque has deepened into the criminal. ¹¹Think of that little affair of the red-headed men. ¹²That was grotesque enough in the outset, and yet it ended in a desperate attempt at robbery. ¹³Or, again, there was that most grotesque affair of the five orange pips, which let straight to a murderous conspiracy. ¹⁴The word puts me on the alert."

¹⁵"Have you it there?" I asked.

¹⁶He read the telegram aloud.

¹⁷"Have just had most incredible and grotesque experience. ¹⁸May I consult you?

¹⁹— "Scott Eccles,

²⁰"Post Office, Charing Cross."

²¹"Man or woman?" I asked.

²²"Oh, man, of course. ²³No woman would ever send a reply-paid telegram. ²⁴She would have come."

²⁵"Will you see him?"

²⁶"My dear Watson, you know how bored I have been since we locked up Colonel Carruthers. ²⁷My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built. ²⁸Life is commonplace, the papers are sterile; audacity and romance seem to have passed forever from the criminal world. ²⁹Can you ask me, then, whether I am ready to look into any new problem, however trivial it may prove? ³⁰But here, unless I am mistaken, is our client."

³¹A measured step was heard upon the stairs, and a moment later a stout, tall, gray-whiskered and solemnly respectable person was ushered into the room. ³²His life history was written in his heavy features and pompous manner. ³³From his spats to his gold-rimmed spectacles he was a Conservative, a churchman, a good citizen, orthodox and conventional to the last degree. ³⁴But some amazing experience had disturbed his native composure and left its traces in his bristling hair, his flushed, angry cheeks, and his flurried, excited manner. ³⁵He plunged instantly into his business.

³⁶“I have had a most singular and unpleasant experience, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ³⁷“Never in my life have I been placed in such a situation. ³⁸It is most improper—most outrageous. ³⁹I must insist upon some explanation.” ⁴⁰He swelled and puffed in his anger.

⁴¹“Pray sit down, Mr. Scott Eccles,” said Holmes in a soothing voice. ⁴²“May I ask, in the first place, why you came to me at all?”

⁴³“Well, sir, it did not appear to be a matter which concerned the police, and yet, when you have heard the facts, you must admit that I could not leave it where it was. ⁴⁴Private detectives are a class with whom I have absolutely no sympathy, but none the less, having heard your name—”

⁴⁵“Quite so. ⁴⁶But, in the second place, why did you not come at once?”

⁴⁷“What do you mean?”

⁴⁸Holmes glanced at his watch.

⁴⁹“It is a quarter-past two,” he said. ⁵⁰“Your telegram was dispatched about one. ⁵¹But no one can glance at your toilet and attire without seeing that your disturbance dates from the moment of your waking.”

⁵²Our client smoothed down his unbrushed hair and felt his unshaven chin.

⁵³“You are right, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁴I never gave a thought to my toilet. ⁵⁵I was only too glad to get out of such a house. ⁵⁶But I have been running round making inquiries before I came to you. ⁵⁷I went to the house agents, you know, and they said that Mr. Garcia's rent was paid up all right and that everything was in order at Wisteria Lodge.”

⁵⁸“Come, come, sir,” said Holmes, laughing. ⁵⁹“You are like my friend, Dr. Watson, who has a bad habit of telling his stories wrong end foremost. ⁶⁰Please arrange your thoughts and let me know, in their due sequence, exactly what those events are which have sent you out unbrushed and unkempt, with dress boots and waistcoat buttoned awry, in search of advice and assistance.”

⁶¹Our client looked down with a rueful face at his own unconventional appearance.

⁶²“I'm sure it must look very bad, Mr. Holmes, and I am not aware that in my whole life such a thing has ever happened before. ⁶³But will tell you the whole queer business, and when I have done so you will admit, I am sure, that there has been enough to excuse me.”

⁶⁴But his narrative was nipped in the bud. ⁶⁵There was a bustle outside, and Mrs. Hudson opened the door to usher in two robust and official-looking individuals, one of whom was well known to us as Inspector Gregson of Scotland Yard, an energetic, gallant, and, within his limitations, a capable officer. ⁶⁶He shook hands with Holmes and introduced his comrade as Inspector Baynes, of the Surrey Constabulary.

⁶⁷“We are hunting together, Mr. Holmes, and our trail lay in this direction.” ⁶⁸He turned his bulldog eyes upon our visitor. ⁶⁹“Are you Mr. John Scott Eccles, of Popham House, Lee?”

⁷⁰“I am.”

⁷¹“We have been following you about all the morning.”

⁷²“You traced him through the telegram, no doubt,” said Holmes.

⁷³“Exactly, Mr. Holmes. ⁷⁴We picked up the scent at Charing Cross Post-Office and came on here.”

⁷⁵“But why do you follow me? ⁷⁶What do you want?”

⁷⁷“We wish a statement, Mr. Scott Eccles, as to the events which let up to the death last night of Mr. Aloysius Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, near Esher.”

⁷⁸Our client had sat up with staring eyes and every tinge of colour struck from his astonished face.

⁷⁹“Dead? ⁸⁰Did you say he was dead?”

⁸¹“Yes, sir, he is dead.”

⁸²“But how? ⁸³An accident?”

⁸⁴“Murder, if ever there was one upon earth.”

⁸⁵“Good God! ⁸⁶This is awful! ⁸⁷You don't mean—you don't mean that I am suspected?”

⁸⁸“A letter of yours was found in the dead man's pocket, and we know by it that you had planned to pass last night at his house.”

⁸⁹“So I did.”

⁹⁰“Oh, you did, did you?”

⁹¹Out came the official notebook.

⁹²“Wait a bit, Gregson,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁹³“All you desire is a plain statement, is it not?”

⁹⁴“And it is my duty to warn Mr. Scott Eccles that it may be used against him.”

⁹⁵“Mr. Eccles was going to tell us about it when you entered the room. ⁹⁶I think, Watson, a brandy and soda would do him no harm. ⁹⁷Now, sir, I suggest that you take no notice of this addition to your audience, and that you proceed with your narrative exactly as you would have done had you never been interrupted.”

⁹⁸Our visitor had gulped off the brandy and the colour had returned to his face. ⁹⁹With a dubious glance at the inspector's notebook, he plunged at once into his extraordinary statement.

¹⁰⁰“I am a bachelor,” said he, “and being of a sociable turn I cultivate a large number of friends.

¹⁰¹Among these are the family of a retired brewer called Melville, living at Abermarle Mansion, Kensington. ¹⁰²It was at his table that I met some weeks ago a young fellow named Garcia. ¹⁰³He was, I understood, of Spanish descent and connected in some way with the embassy. ¹⁰⁴He spoke perfect English, was pleasing in his manners, and as good-looking a man as ever I saw in my life.

¹⁰⁵“In some way we struck up quite a friendship, this young fellow and I. ¹⁰⁶He seemed to take a fancy to me from the first, and within two days of our meeting he came to see me at Lee. ¹⁰⁷One thing led to another, and it ended in his inviting me out to spend a few days at his house, Wisteria Lodge, between Esher and Oxshott. ¹⁰⁸Yesterday evening I went to Esher to fulfil this engagement.

¹⁰⁹“He had described his household to me before I went there. ¹¹⁰He lived with a faithful servant, a countryman of his own, who looked after all his needs. ¹¹¹This fellow could speak English and did his housekeeping for him. ¹¹²Then there was a wonderful cook, he said, a half-breed whom he had picked up in his travels, who could serve an excellent dinner. ¹¹³I remember that he remarked what a queer household it was to find in the heart of Surrey, and that I agreed with him, though it has proved a good deal queerer than I thought.

¹¹⁴“I drove to the place—about two miles on the south side of Esher. ¹¹⁵The house was a fair-sized one, standing back from the road, with a curving drive which was banked with high evergreen shrubs. ¹¹⁶It was an old, tumbledown building in a crazy state of disrepair. ¹¹⁷When the trap pulled up on the grass-grown drive in front of the blotched and weather-stained door, I had doubts as to my wisdom in visiting a man whom I knew so slightly. ¹¹⁸He opened the door himself, however, and greeted me with a great show of cordiality. ¹¹⁹I was handed over to the manservant, a melancholy, swarthy individual, who led the way, my bag in his hand, to my bedroom. ¹²⁰The whole place was depressing. ¹²¹Our dinner was

tête-à-tête, and though my host did his best to be entertaining, his thoughts seemed to continually wander, and he talked so vaguely and wildly that I could hardly understand him. ¹²²He continually drummed his fingers on the table, gnawed his nails, and gave other signs of nervous impatience. ¹²³The dinner itself was neither well served nor well cooked, and the gloomy presence of the taciturn servant did not help to enliven us. ¹²⁴I can assure you that many times in the course of the evening I wished that I could invent some excuse which would take me back to Lee.

¹²⁵“One thing comes back to my memory which may have a bearing upon the business that you two gentlemen are investigating. ¹²⁶I thought nothing of it at the time. ¹²⁷Near the end of dinner a note was handed in by the servant. ¹²⁸I noticed that after my host had read it he seemed even more distraught and strange than before. ¹²⁹He gave up all pretence at conversation and sat, smoking endless cigarettes, lost in his own thoughts, but he made no remark as to the contents. ¹³⁰About eleven I was glad to go to bed. ¹³¹Some time later Garcia looked in at my door—the room was dark at the time—and asked me if I had rung. ¹³²I said that I had not. ¹³³He apologized for having disturbed me so late, saying that it was nearly one o'clock. ¹³⁴I dropped off after this and slept soundly all night.

¹³⁵“And now I come to the amazing part of my tale. ¹³⁶When I woke it was broad daylight. ¹³⁷I glanced at my watch, and the time was nearly nine. ¹³⁸I had particularly asked to be called at eight, so I was very much astonished at this forgetfulness. ¹³⁹I sprang up and rang for the servant. ¹⁴⁰There was no response. ¹⁴¹I rang again and again, with the same result. ¹⁴²Then I came to the conclusion that the bell was out of order. ¹⁴³I huddled on my clothes and hurried downstairs in an exceedingly bad temper to order some hot water. ¹⁴⁴You can imagine my surprise when I found that there was no one there. ¹⁴⁵I shouted in the hall. ¹⁴⁶There was no answer. ¹⁴⁷Then I ran from room to room. ¹⁴⁸All were deserted. ¹⁴⁹My host had shown me which was his bedroom the night before, so I knocked at the door. ¹⁵⁰No reply. ¹⁵¹I turned the handle and walked in. ¹⁵²The room was empty, and the bed had never been slept in. ¹⁵³He had gone with the rest. ¹⁵⁴The foreign host, the foreign footman, the foreign cook, all had vanished in the night! ¹⁵⁵That was the end of my visit to Wisteria Lodge.”

¹⁵⁶Sherlock Holmes was rubbing his hands and chuckling as he added this bizarre incident to his collection of strange episodes.

¹⁵⁷“Your experience is, so far as I know, perfectly unique,” said he. ¹⁵⁸“May I ask, sir, what you did then?”

¹⁵⁹“I was furious. ¹⁶⁰My first idea was that I had been the victim of some absurd practical joke. ¹⁶¹I packed my things, banged the hall door behind me, and set off for Esher, with my bag in my hand. ¹⁶²I called at Allan Brothers', the chief land agents in the village, and found that it was from this firm that the villa had been rented. ¹⁶³It struck me that the whole proceeding could hardly be for the purpose of making a fool of me, and that the main object must be to get out of the rent. ¹⁶⁴It is late in March, so quarter-day is at hand. ¹⁶⁵But this theory would not work. ¹⁶⁶The agent was obliged to me for my warning, but told me that the rent had been paid in advance. ¹⁶⁷Then I made my way to town and called at the Spanish embassy. ¹⁶⁸The man was unknown there. ¹⁶⁹After this I went to see Melville, at whose house I had first met Garcia, but I found that he really knew rather less about him than I did. ¹⁷⁰Finally when I got your reply to my wire I came out to you, since I gather that you are a person who gives advice in difficult cases. ¹⁷¹But now, Mr. Inspector, I understand, from what you said when you entered the room, that you can carry the story on, and that some tragedy had occurred. ¹⁷²I can assure you that every word I have said is the truth, and that, outside of what I have told you, I know absolutely nothing about the fate of this man. ¹⁷³My only desire is to help the law in every possible way.”

¹⁷⁴“I am sure of it, Mr. Scott Eccles—I am sure of it,” said Inspector Gregson in a very amiable tone.

¹⁷⁵“I am bound to say that everything which you have said agrees very closely with the facts as they have come to our notice. ¹⁷⁶For example, there was that note which arrived during dinner. ¹⁷⁷Did you chance to observe what became of it?”

¹⁷⁸“Yes, I did. ¹⁷⁹Garcia rolled it up and threw it into the fire.”

¹⁸⁰“What do you say to that, Mr. Baynes?”

¹⁸¹The country detective was a stout, puffy, red man, whose face was only redeemed from grossness by two extraordinarily bright eyes, almost hidden behind the heavy creases of cheek and brow. ¹⁸²With a slow smile he drew a folded and discoloured scrap of paper from his pocket.

¹⁸³“It was a dog-grate, Mr. Holmes, and he overpitched it. ¹⁸⁴I picked this out unburned from the back of it.”

¹⁸⁵Holmes smiled his appreciation.

¹⁸⁶“You must have examined the house very carefully to find a single pellet of paper.”

¹⁸⁷“I did, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁸⁸It's my way. ¹⁸⁹Shall I read it, Mr. Gregson?”

¹⁹⁰The Londoner nodded.

¹⁹¹“The note is written upon ordinary cream-laid paper without watermark. ¹⁹²It is a quarter-sheet. ¹⁹³The paper is cut off in two snips with a short-bladed scissors. ¹⁹⁴It has been folded over three times and sealed with purple wax, put on hurriedly and pressed down with some flat oval object. ¹⁹⁵It is addressed to Mr. Garcia, Wisteria Lodge. ¹⁹⁶It says:

¹⁹⁷“Our own colours, green and white. ¹⁹⁸Green open, white shut. ¹⁹⁹Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize. ²⁰⁰Godspeed.

²⁰¹— D.

²⁰²“It is a woman's writing, done with a sharp-pointed pen, but the address is either done with another pen or by someone else. ²⁰³It is thicker and bolder, as you see.”

²⁰⁴“A very remarkable note,” said Holmes, glancing it over. ²⁰⁵“I must compliment you, Mr. Baynes, upon your attention to detail in your examination of it. ²⁰⁶A few trifling points might perhaps be added. ²⁰⁷The oval seal is undoubtedly a plain sleeve-link—what else is of such a shape? ²⁰⁸The scissors were bent nail scissors. ²⁰⁹Short as the two snips are, you can distinctly see the same slight curve in each.”

²¹⁰The country detective chuckled.

²¹¹“I thought I had squeezed all the juice out of it, but I see there was a little over,” he said. ²¹²“I'm bound to say that I make nothing of the note except that there was something on hand, and that a woman, as usual, was at the bottom of it.”

²¹³Mr. Scott Eccles had fidgeted in his seat during this conversation.

²¹⁴“I am glad you found the note, since it corroborates my story,” said he. ²¹⁵“But I beg to point out that I have not yet heard what has happened to Mr. Garcia, nor what has become of his household.”

²¹⁶“As to Garcia,” said Gregson, “that is easily answered. ²¹⁷He was found dead this morning upon Oxshott Common, nearly a mile from his home. ²¹⁸His head had been smashed to pulp by heavy blows of a sandbag or some such instrument, which had crushed rather than wounded. ²¹⁹It is a lonely corner, and there is no house within a quarter of a mile of the spot. ²²⁰He had apparently been struck down first from behind, but his assailant had gone on beating him long after he was dead. ²²¹It was a most furious assault. ²²²There are no footsteps nor any clue to the criminals.”

²²³“Robbed?”

²²⁴“No, there was no attempt at robbery.”

²²⁵“This is very painful—very painful and terrible,” said Mr. Scott Eccles in a querulous voice, “but it is really uncommonly hard on me. ²²⁶I had nothing to do with my host going off upon a nocturnal excursion and meeting so sad an end. ²²⁷How do I come to be mixed up with the case?”

²²⁸“Very simply, sir,” Inspector Baynes answered. ²²⁹“The only document found in the pocket of the deceased was a letter from you saying that you would be with him on the night of his death. ²³⁰It was the envelope of this letter which gave us the dead man's name and address. ²³¹It was after nine this morning when we reached his house and found neither you nor anyone else inside it. ²³²I wired to Mr. Gregson to run you down in London while I examined Wisteria Lodge. ²³³Then I came into town, joined Mr. Gregson, and here we are.”

²³⁴“I think now,” said Gregson, rising, “we had best put this matter into an official shape. ²³⁵You will come round with us to the station, Mr. Scott Eccles, and let us have your statement in writing.”

²³⁶“Certainly, I will come at once. ²³⁷But I retain your services, Mr. Holmes. ²³⁸I desire you to spare no expense and no pains to get at the truth.”

²³⁹My friend turned to the country inspector.

²⁴⁰“I suppose that you have no objection to my collaborating with you, Mr. Baynes?”

²⁴¹“Highly honoured, sir, I am sure.”

²⁴²“You appear to have been very prompt and businesslike in all that you have done. ²⁴³Was there any clue, may I ask, as to the exact hour that the man met his death?”

²⁴⁴“He had been there since one o'clock. ²⁴⁵There was rain about that time, and his death had certainly been before the rain.”

²⁴⁶“But that is perfectly impossible, Mr. Baynes,” cried our client. ²⁴⁷“His voice is unmistakable. ²⁴⁸I could swear to it that it was he who addressed me in my bedroom at that very hour.”

²⁴⁹“Remarkable, but by no means impossible,” said Holmes, smiling.

²⁵⁰“You have a clue?” asked Gregson.

²⁵¹“On the face of it the case is not a very complex one, though it certainly presents some novel and interesting features. ²⁵²A further knowledge of facts is necessary before I would venture to give a final and definite opinion. ²⁵³By the way, Mr. Baynes, did you find anything remarkable besides this note in your examination of the house?”

²⁵⁴The detective looked at my friend in a singular way.

²⁵⁵“There were,” said he, “one or two very remarkable things. ²⁵⁶Perhaps when I have finished at the police-station you would care to come out and give me your opinion of them.”

²⁵⁷“In am entirely at your service,” said Sherlock Holmes, ringing the bell. ²⁵⁸“You will show these gentlemen out, Mrs. Hudson, and kindly send the boy with this telegram. ²⁵⁹He is to pay a five-shilling reply.”

²⁶⁰We sat for some time in silence after our visitors had left. ²⁶¹Holmes smoked hard, with his brows drawn down over his keen eyes, and his head thrust forward in the eager way characteristic of the man.

²⁶²“Well, Watson,” he asked, turning suddenly upon me, “what do you make of it?”

²⁶³“I can make nothing of this mystification of Scott Eccles.”

²⁶⁴“But the crime?”

²⁶⁵“Well, taken with the disappearance of the man's companions, I should say that they were in some way concerned in the murder and had fled from justice.”

²⁶⁶“That is certainly a possible point of view. ²⁶⁷On the face of it you must admit, however, that it is very strange that his two servants should have been in a conspiracy against him and should have attacked him on the one night when he had a guest. ²⁶⁸They had him alone at their mercy every other night in the week.”

²⁶⁹“Then why did they fly?”

²⁷⁰“Quite so. ²⁷¹Why did they fly? ²⁷²There is a big fact. ²⁷³Another big fact is the remarkable experience of our client, Scott Eccles. ²⁷⁴Now, my dear Watson, is it beyond the limits of human ingenuity to furnish an explanation which would cover both of these big facts? ²⁷⁵If it were one which would also admit of the mysterious note with its very curious phraseology, why, then it would be worth accepting as a temporary hypothesis. ²⁷⁶If the fresh facts which come to our knowledge all fit themselves into the scheme, then our hypothesis may gradually become a solution.”

²⁷⁷“But what is our hypothesis?”

²⁷⁸Holmes leaned back in his chair with half-closed eyes.

²⁷⁹“You must admit, my dear Watson, that the idea of a joke is impossible. ²⁸⁰There were grave events afoot, as the sequel showed, and the coaxing of Scott Eccles to Wisteria Lodge had some connection with them.”

²⁸¹“But what possible connection?”

²⁸²“Let us take it link by link. ²⁸³There is, on the face of it, something unnatural about this strange and sudden friendship between the young Spaniard and Scott Eccles. ²⁸⁴It was the former who forced the pace. ²⁸⁵He called upon Eccles at the other end of London on the very day after he first met him, and he kept in close touch with him until he got him down to Esher. ²⁸⁶Now, what did he want with Eccles? ²⁸⁷What could Eccles supply? ²⁸⁸I see no charm in the man. ²⁸⁹He is not particularly intelligent—not a man likely to be congenial to a quick-witted Latin. ²⁹⁰Why, then, was he picked out from all the other people whom Garcia met as particularly suited to his purpose? ²⁹¹Has he any one outstanding quality? ²⁹²I say that he has. ²⁹³He is the very type of conventional British respectability, and the very man as a witness to impress another Briton. ²⁹⁴You saw yourself how neither of the inspectors dreamed of questioning his statement, extraordinary as it was.”

²⁹⁵“But what was he to witness?”

²⁹⁶“Nothing, as things turned out, but everything had they gone another way. ²⁹⁷That is how I read the matter.”

²⁹⁸“I see, he might have proved an alibi.”

²⁹⁹“Exactly, my dear Watson; he might have proved an alibi. ³⁰⁰We will suppose, for argument's sake, that the household of Wisteria Lodge are confederates in some design. ³⁰¹The attempt, whatever it may be, is to come off, we will say, before one o'clock. ³⁰²By some juggling of the clocks it is quite possible that they may have got Scott Eccles to bed earlier than he thought, but in any case it is likely that when Garcia went out of his way to tell him that it was one it was really not more than twelve. ³⁰³If Garcia could do whatever he had to do and be back by the hour mentioned he had evidently a powerful reply to any accusation. ³⁰⁴Here was this irreproachable Englishman ready to swear in any court of law that the accused was in the house all the time. ³⁰⁵It was an insurance against the worst.”

³⁰⁶“Yes, yes, I see that. ³⁰⁷But how about the disappearance of the others?”

³⁰⁸“I have not all my facts yet, but I do not think there are any insuperable difficulties. ³⁰⁹Still, it is an error to argue in front of your data. ³¹⁰You find yourself insensibly twisting them round to fit your theories.”

³¹¹“And the message?”

³¹²“How did it run? ³¹³‘Our own colours, green and white.’ ³¹⁴Sounds like racing. ³¹⁵‘Green open, white shut.’ ³¹⁶That is clearly a signal. ³¹⁷‘Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize.’ ³¹⁸This is an assignation. ³¹⁹We may find a jealous husband at the bottom of it all. ³²⁰It was clearly a dangerous quest. ³²¹She would not have said ‘Godspeed’ had it not been so. ³²²‘D’—that should be a guide.”

³²³“The man was a Spaniard. ³²⁴I suggest that ‘D’ stands for Dolores, a common female name in Spain.”

³²⁵“Good, Watson, very good—but quite inadmissible. ³²⁶A Spaniard would write to a Spaniard in Spanish. ³²⁷The writer of this note is certainly English. ³²⁸Well, we can only possess our soul in patience until this excellent inspector come back for us. ³²⁹Meanwhile we can thank our lucky fate which has rescued us for a few short hours from the insufferable fatigues of idleness.”

³³⁰An answer had arrived to Holmes's telegram before our Surrey officer had returned. ³³¹Holmes read it and was about to place it in his notebook when he caught a glimpse of my expectant face. ³³²He tossed it across with a laugh.

³³³“We are moving in exalted circles,” said he.

³³⁴The telegram was a list of names and addresses:

³³⁵Lord Harringby, The Dingle; Sir George Ffolliott, Oxshott Towers; Mr. Hynes Hynes, J.P., Purdley Place; Mr. James Baker Williams, Forton Old Hall; Mr. Henderson, High Gable; Rev. Joshua Stone, Nether Walsling.

³³⁶“This is a very obvious way of limiting our field of operations,” said Holmes. ³³⁷“No doubt Baynes, with his methodical mind, has already adopted some similar plan.”

³³⁸“I don't quite understand.”

³³⁹“Well, my dear fellow, we have already arrived at the conclusion that the message received by Garcia at dinner was an appointment or an assignation. ³⁴⁰Now, if the obvious reading of it is correct, and in order to keep the tryst one has to ascend a main stair and seek the seventh door in a corridor, it is perfectly clear that the house is a very large one. ³⁴¹It is equally certain that this house cannot be more than a mile or two from Oxshott, since Garcia was walking in that direction and hoped, according to my reading of the facts, to be back in Wisteria Lodge in time to avail himself of an alibi, which would only be valid up to one o'clock. ³⁴²As the number of large houses close to Oxshott must be limited, I adopted the obvious method of sending to the agents mentioned by Scott Eccles and obtaining a list of them. ³⁴³Here they are in this telegram, and the other end of our tangled skein must lie among them.”

³⁴⁴It was nearly six o'clock before we found ourselves in the pretty Surrey village of Esher, with Inspector Baynes as our companion.

³⁴⁵Holmes and I had taken things for the night, and found comfortable quarters at the Bull. ³⁴⁶Finally we set out in the company of the detective on our visit to Wisteria Lodge. ³⁴⁷It was a cold, dark March evening, with a sharp wind and a fine rain beating upon our faces, a fit setting for the wild common over which our road passed and the tragic goal to which it led us.

Chapter II.

The Tiger of San Pedro

¹A cold and melancholy walk of a couple of miles brought us to a high wooden gate, which opened into a gloomy avenue of chestnuts. ²The curved and shadowed drive led us to a low, dark house, pitch-black against a slate-coloured sky. ³From the front window upon the left of the door there peeped a glimmer of a feeble light.

⁴"There's a constable in possession," said Baynes. ⁵"I'll knock at the window." ⁶He stepped across the grass plot and tapped with his hand on the pane. ⁷Through the fogged glass I dimly saw a man spring up from a chair beside the fire, and heard a sharp cry from within the room. ⁸An instant later a white-faced, hard-breathing policeman had opened the door, the candle wavering in his trembling hand.

⁹"What's the matter, Walters?" asked Baynes sharply.

¹⁰The man mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and agave a long sigh of relief.

¹¹"I am glad you have come, sir. ¹²It has been a long evening, and I don't think my nerve is as good as it was."

¹³"Your nerve, Walters? ¹⁴I should not have thought you had a nerve in your body."

¹⁵"Well, sir, it's this lonely, silent house and the queer thing in the kitchen. ¹⁶Then when you tapped at the window I thought it had come again."

¹⁷"That what had come again?"

¹⁸"The devil, sir, for all I know. ¹⁹It was at the window."

²⁰"What was at the window, and when?"

²¹"It was just about two hours ago. ²²The light was just fading. ²³I was sitting reading in the chair. ²⁴I don't know what made me look up, but there was a face looking in at me through the lower pane. ²⁵Lord, sir, what a face it was! ²⁶I'll see it in my dreams."

²⁷"Tut, tut, Walters. ²⁸This is not talk for a police-constable."

²⁹"I know, sir, I know; but it shook me, sir, and there's no use to deny it. ³⁰It wasn't black, sir, nor was it white, nor any colour that I know but a kind of queer shade like clay with a splash of milk in it. ³¹Then there was the size of it—it was twice yours, sir. ³²And the look of it—the great staring goggle eyes, and the line of white teeth like a hungry beast. ³³I tell you, sir, I couldn't move a finger, nor get my breath, till it whisked away and was gone. ³⁴Out I ran and through the shrubbery, but thank God there was no one there."

³⁵"If I didn't know you were a good man, Walters, I should put a black mark against you for this. ³⁶If it were the devil himself a constable on duty should never thank God that he could not lay his hands upon him. ³⁷I suppose the whole thing is not a vision and a touch of nerves?"

³⁸"That, at least, is very easily settled," said Holmes, lighting his little pocket lantern. ³⁹"Yes," he reported, after a short examination of the grass bed, "a number twelve shoe, I should say. ⁴⁰If he was all on the same scale as his foot he must certainly have been a giant."

⁴¹"What became of him?"

⁴²"He seems to have broken through the shrubbery and made for the road."

⁴³“Well,” said the inspector with a grave and thoughtful face, “whoever he may have been, and whatever he may have wanted, he's gone for the present, and we have more immediate things to attend to. ⁴⁴Now, Mr. Holmes, with your permission, I will show you round the house.”

⁴⁵The various bedrooms and sitting-rooms had yielded nothing to a careful search. ⁴⁶Apparently the tenants had brought little or nothing with them, and all the furniture down to the smallest details had been taken over with the house. ⁴⁷A good deal of clothing with the stamp of Marx and Co., High Holborn, had been left behind. ⁴⁸Telegraphic inquiries had been already made which showed that Marx knew nothing of his customer save that he was a good payer. ⁴⁹Odds and ends, some pipes, a few novels, two of them in Spanish, and old-fashioned pinfire revolver, and a guitar were among the personal property.

⁵⁰“Nothing in all this,” said Baynes, stalking, candle in hand, from room to room. ⁵¹“But now, Mr. Holmes, I invite your attention to the kitchen.”

⁵²It was a gloomy, high-ceilinged room at the back of the house, with a straw litter in one corner, which served apparently as a bed for the cook. ⁵³The table was piled with half-eaten dishes and dirty plates, the debris of last night's dinner.

⁵⁴“Look at this,” said Baynes. ⁵⁵“What do you make of it?”

⁵⁶He held up his candle before an extraordinary object which stood at the back of the dresser. ⁵⁷It was so wrinkled and shrunken and withered that it was difficult to say what it might have been. ⁵⁸One could but say that it was black and leathery and that it bore some resemblance to a dwarfish, human figure. ⁵⁹At first, as I examined it, I thought that it was a mummified negro baby, and then it seemed a very twisted and ancient monkey. ⁶⁰Finally I was left in doubt as to whether it was animal or human. ⁶¹A double band of white shells were strung round the centre of it.

⁶²“Very interesting—very interesting, indeed!” said Holmes, peering at this sinister relic. ⁶³“Anything more?”

⁶⁴In silence Baynes led the way to the sink and held forward his candle. ⁶⁵The limbs and body of some large, white bird, torn savagely to pieces with the feathers still on, were littered all over it. ⁶⁶Holmes pointed to the wattles on the severed head.

⁶⁷“A white cock,” said he. ⁶⁸“Most interesting! ⁶⁹It is really a very curious case.”

⁷⁰But Mr. Baynes had kept his most sinister exhibit to the last. ⁷¹From under the sink he drew a zinc pail which contained a quantity of blood. ⁷²Then from the table he took a platter heaped with small pieces of charred bone.

⁷³“Something has been killed and something has been burned. ⁷⁴We raked all these out of the fire. ⁷⁵We had a doctor in this morning. ⁷⁶He says that they are not human.”

⁷⁷Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands.

⁷⁸“I must congratulate you, Inspector, on handling so distinctive and instructive a case. ⁷⁹Your powers, if I may say so without offence, seem superior to your opportunities.”

⁸⁰Inspector Baynes's small eyes twinkled with pleasure.

⁸¹“You're right, Mr. Holmes. ⁸²We stagnate in the provinces. ⁸³A case of this sort gives a man a chance, and I hope that I shall take it. ⁸⁴What do you make of these bones?”

⁸⁵“A lamb, I should say, or a kid.”

⁸⁶“And the white cock?”

⁸⁷“Curious, Mr. Baynes, very curious. ⁸⁸I should say almost unique.”

⁸⁹“Yes, sir, there must have been some very strange people with some very strange ways in this house.

⁹⁰One of them is dead. ⁹¹Did his companions follow him and kill him? ⁹²If they did we should have them, for every port is watched. ⁹³But my own views are different. ⁹⁴Yes, sir, my own views are very different.”

⁹⁵“You have a theory then?”

⁹⁶“And I'll work it myself, Mr. Holmes. ⁹⁷It's only due to my own credit to do so. ⁹⁸Your name is made, but I have still to make mine. ⁹⁹I should be glad to be able to say afterwards that I had solved it without your help.”

¹⁰⁰Holmes laughed good-humoredly.

¹⁰¹“Well, well, Inspector,” said he. ¹⁰²“Do you follow your path and I will follow mine. ¹⁰³My results are always very much at your service if you care to apply to me for them. ¹⁰⁴I think that I have seen all that I wish in this house, and that my time may be more profitably employed elsewhere. ¹⁰⁵Au revoir and good luck!”

¹⁰⁶I could tell by numerous subtle signs, which might have been lost upon anyone but myself, that Holmes was on a hot scent. ¹⁰⁷As impassive as ever to the casual observer, there were none the less a subdued eagerness and suggestion of tension in his brightened eyes and brisker manner which assured me that the game was afoot. ¹⁰⁸After his habit he said nothing, and after mine I asked no questions. ¹⁰⁹Sufficient for me to share the sport and lend my humble help to the capture without distracting that intent brain with needless interruption. ¹¹⁰All would come round to me in due time.

¹¹¹I waited, therefore—but to my ever-deepening disappointment I waited in vain. ¹¹²Day succeeded day, and my friend took no step forward. ¹¹³One morning he spent in town, and I learned from a casual reference that he had visited the British Museum. ¹¹⁴Save for this one excursion, he spent his days in long and often solitary walks, or in chatting with a number of village gossips whose acquaintance he had cultivated.

¹¹⁵“I'm sure, Watson, a week in the country will be invaluable to you,” he remarked. ¹¹⁶“It is very pleasant to see the first green shoots upon the hedges and the catkins on the hazels once again. ¹¹⁷With a spud, a tin box, and an elementary book on botany, there are instructive days to be spent.” ¹¹⁸He prowled about with this equipment himself, but it was a poor show of plants which he would bring back of an evening.

¹¹⁹Occasionally in our rambles we came across Inspector Baynes. ¹²⁰His fat, red face wreathed itself in smiles and his small eyes glittered as he greeted my companion. ¹²¹He said little about the case, but from that little we gathered that he also was not dissatisfied at the course of events. ¹²²I must admit, however, that I was somewhat surprised when, some five days after the crime, I opened my morning paper to find in large letters:

¹²³The Oxshott Mystery

¹²⁴A Solution

¹²⁵Arrest of Supposed Assassin

¹²⁶Holmes sprang in his chair as if he had been stung when I read the headlines.

¹²⁶“By Jove!” he cried. ¹²⁷“You don't mean that Baynes has got him?”

¹²⁸“Apparently,” said I as I read the following report:

¹²⁹“Great excitement was caused in Esher and the neighbouring district when it was learned late last night that an arrest had been effected in connection with the Oxshott murder. ¹³⁰It will be remembered that Mr. Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, was found dead on Oxshott Common, his body showing signs of extreme violence, and that on the same night his servant and his cook fled, which appeared to show their participation in the crime. ¹³¹It was suggested, but never proved, that the deceased gentleman may have had valuables in the house, and that their abstraction was the motive of the crime. ¹³²Every effort was made by Inspector Baynes, who has the case in hand, to ascertain the hiding place of the fugitives, and he had good reason to believe that they had not gone far but were lurking in some retreat which had been already prepared. ¹³³It was certain from the first, however, that they would eventually be detected, as the cook, from the evidence of one or two tradespeople who have caught a glimpse of him through the window, was a man of most remarkable appearance—being a huge and hideous mulatto, with yellowish features of a pronounced negroid type. ¹³⁴This man has been seen since the crime, for he was detected and pursued by Constable Walters on the same evening, when he had the audacity to revisit Wisteria Lodge. ¹³⁵Inspector Baynes, considering that such a visit must have some purpose in view and was likely, therefore, to be repeated, abandoned the house but left an ambuscade in the shrubbery. ¹³⁶The man walked into the trap and was captured last night after a struggle in which Constable Downing was badly bitten by the savage. ¹³⁷We understand that when the prison is brought before the magistrates a remand will be applied for by the police, and that great developments are hoped from his capture.”

¹³⁸“Really we must see Baynes at once,” cried Holmes, picking up his hat. ¹³⁹“We will just catch him before he starts.” ¹⁴⁰We hurried down the village street and found, as we had expected, that the inspector was just leaving his lodgings.

¹⁴¹“You’ve seen the paper, Mr. Holmes?” he asked, holding one out to us.

¹⁴²“Yes, Baynes, I’ve seen it. ¹⁴³Pray don’t think it a liberty if I give you a word of friendly warning.”

¹⁴⁴“Of warning, Mr. Holmes?”

¹⁴⁵“I have looked into this case with some care, and I am not convinced that you are on the right lines.

¹⁴⁶I don’t want you to commit yourself too far unless you are sure.”

¹⁴⁷“You’re very kind, Mr. Holmes.”

¹⁴⁸“I assure you I speak for your good.”

¹⁴⁹It seemed to me that something like a wink quivered for an instant over one of Mr. Baynes’s tiny eyes.

¹⁵⁰“We agreed to work on our own lines, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁵¹That’s what I am doing.”

¹⁵²“Oh, very good,” said Holmes. ¹⁵³“Don’t blame me.”

¹⁵⁴“No, sir; I believe you mean well by me. ¹⁵⁵But we all have our own systems, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁵⁶You have yours, and maybe I have mine.”

¹⁵⁷“Let us say no more about it.”

¹⁵⁸“You’re welcome always to my news. ¹⁵⁹This fellow is a perfect savage, as strong as a cart-horse and as fierce as the devil. ¹⁶⁰He chewed Downing’s thumb nearly off before they could master him. ¹⁶¹He hardly speaks a word of English, and we can get nothing out of him but grunts.”

¹⁶²“And you think you have evidence that he murdered his late master?”

¹⁶³“I didn’t say so, Mr. Holmes; I didn’t say so. ¹⁶⁴We all have our little ways. ¹⁶⁵You try yours and I will try mine. ¹⁶⁶That’s the agreement.”

¹⁶⁷Holmes shrugged his shoulders as we walked away together. ¹⁶⁸"I can't make the man out. ¹⁶⁹He seems to be riding for a fall. ¹⁷⁰Well, as he says, we must each try our own way and see what comes of it. ¹⁷¹But there's something in Inspector Baynes which I can't quite understand."

¹⁷²"Just sit down in that chair, Watson," said Sherlock Holmes when we had returned to our apartment at the Bull. ¹⁷³"I want to put you in touch with the situation, as I may need your help to-night. ¹⁷⁴Let me show you the evolution of this case so far as I have been able to follow it. ¹⁷⁵Simple as it has been in its leading features, it has none the less presented surprising difficulties in the way of an arrest. ¹⁷⁶There are gaps in that direction which we have still to fill.

¹⁷⁷"We will go back to the note which was handed in to Garcia upon the evening of his death. ¹⁷⁸We may put aside this idea of Baynes's that Garcia's servants were concerned in the matter. ¹⁷⁹The proof of this lies in the fact that it was he who had arranged for the presence of Scott Eccles, which could only have been done for the purpose of an alibi. ¹⁸⁰It was Garcia, then, who had an enterprise, and apparently a criminal enterprise, in hand that night in the course of which he met his death. ¹⁸¹I say 'criminal' because only a man with a criminal enterprise desires to establish an alibi. ¹⁸²Who, then, is most likely to have taken his life? ¹⁸³Surely the person against whom the criminal enterprise was directed. ¹⁸⁴So far it seems to me that we are on safe ground.

¹⁸⁵"We can now see a reason for the disappearance of Garcia's household. ¹⁸⁶They were all confederates in the same unknown crime. ¹⁸⁷If it came off when Garcia returned, any possible suspicion would be warded off by the Englishman's evidence, and all would be well. ¹⁸⁸But the attempt was a dangerous one, and if Garcia did not return by a certain hour it was probable that his own life had been sacrificed. ¹⁸⁹It had been arranged, therefore, that in such a case his two subordinates were to make for some prearranged spot where they could escape investigation and be in a position afterwards to renew their attempt. ¹⁹⁰That would fully explain the facts, would it not?"

¹⁹¹The whole inexplicable tangle seemed to straighten out before me. ¹⁹²I wondered, as I always did, how it had not been obvious to me before.

¹⁹²"But why should one servant return?"

¹⁹³"We can imagine that in the confusion of flight something precious, something which he could not bear to part with, had been left behind. ¹⁹⁴That would explain his persistence, would it not?"

¹⁹⁵"Well, what is the next step?"

¹⁹⁶"The next step is the note received by Garcia at the dinner. ¹⁹⁷It indicates a confederate at the other end. ¹⁹⁸Now, where was the other end? ¹⁹⁹I have already shown you that it could only lie in some large house, and that the number of large houses is limited. ²⁰⁰My first days in this village were devoted to a series of walks in which in the intervals of my botanical researches I made a reconnaissance of all the large houses and an examination of the family history of the occupants. ²⁰¹One house, and only one, riveted my attention. ²⁰²It is the famous old Jacobean grange of High Gable, one mile on the farther side of Oxshott, and less than half a mile from the scene of the tragedy. ²⁰³The other mansions belonged to prosaic and respectable people who live far aloof from romance. ²⁰⁴But Mr. Henderson, of High Gable, was by all accounts a curious man to whom curious adventures might befall. ²⁰⁵I concentrated my attention, therefore, upon him and his household.

²⁰⁶"A singular set of people, Watson—the man himself the most singular of them all. ²⁰⁷I managed to see him on a plausible pretext, but I seemed to read in his dark, deepset, brooding eyes that he was perfectly aware of my true business. ²⁰⁸He is a man of fifty, strong, active, with iron-gray hair, great bunched black eyebrows, the step of a deer and the air of an emperor—a fierce, masterful man, with a red-hot spirit behind his parchment face. ²⁰⁹He is either a foreigner or has lived long in the tropics, for he is yellow and sapless, but tough as whipcord. ²¹⁰His friend and secretary, Mr. Lucas, is undoubtedly

a foreigner, chocolate brown, wily, suave, and catlike, with a poisonous gentleness of speech. ²¹¹You see, Watson, we have come already upon two sets of foreigners—one at Wisteria Lodge and one at High Gable—so our gaps are beginning to close.

²¹²“These two men, close and confidential friends, are the centre of the household; but there is one other person who for our immediate purpose may be even more important. ²¹³Henderson has two children—girls of eleven and thirteen. ²¹⁴Their governess is a Miss Burnet, an Englishwoman of forty or thereabouts. ²¹⁵There is also one confidential manservant. ²¹⁶This little group forms the real family, for their travel about together, and Henderson is a great traveller, always on the move. ²¹⁷It is only within the last weeks that he has returned, after a year's absence, to High Gable. ²¹⁸I may add that he is enormously rich, and whatever his whims may be he can very easily satisfy them. ²¹⁹For the rest, his house is full of butlers, footmen, maidservants, and the usual overfed, underworked staff of a large English country house.

²²⁰“So much I learned partly from village gossip and partly from my own observation. ²²¹There are no better instruments than discharged servants with a grievance, and I was lucky enough to find one. ²²²I call it luck, but it would not have come my way had I not been looking out for it. ²²³As Baynes remarks, we all have our systems. ²²⁴It was my system which enabled me to find John Warner, late gardener of High Gable, sacked in a moment of temper by his imperious employer. ²²⁵He in turn had friends among the indoor servants who unite in their fear and dislike of their master. ²²⁶So I had my key to the secrets of the establishment.

²²⁷“Curious people, Watson! ²²⁸I don't pretend to understand it all yet, but very curious people anyway. ²²⁹It's a double-winged house, and the servants live on one side, the family on the other. ²³⁰There's no link between the two save for Henderson's own servant, who serves the family's meals. ²³¹Everything is carried to a certain door, which forms the one connection. ²³²Governess and children hardly go out at all, except into the garden. ²³³Henderson never by any chance walks alone. ²³⁴His dark secretary is like his shadow. ²³⁵The gossip among the servants is that their master is terribly afraid of something. ²³⁶‘Sold his soul to the devil in exchange for money,’ says Warner, ‘and expects his creditor to come up and claim his own.’ ²³⁷Where they came from, or who they are, nobody has an idea. ²³⁸They are very violent. ²³⁹Twice Henderson has lashed at folk with his dog-whip, and only his long purse and heavy compensation have kept him out of the courts.

²⁴⁰“Well, now, Watson, let us judge the situation by this new information. ²⁴¹We may take it that the letter came out of this strange household and was an invitation to Garcia to carry out some attempt which had already been planned. ²⁴²Who wrote the note? ²⁴³It was someone within the citadel, and it was a woman. ²⁴⁴Who then but Miss Burnet, the governess? ²⁴⁵All our reasoning seems to point that way. ²⁴⁶At any rate, we may take it as a hypothesis and see what consequences it would entail. ²⁴⁷I may add that Miss Burnet's age and character make it certain that my first idea that there might be a love interest in our story is out of the question.

²⁴⁸“If she wrote the note she was presumably the friend and confederate of Garcia. ²⁴⁹What, then, might she be expected to do if she heard of his death? ²⁵⁰If he met it in some nefarious enterprise her lips might be sealed. ²⁵¹Still, in her heart, she must retain bitterness and hatred against those who had killed him and would presumably help so far as she could to have revenge upon them. ²⁵²Could we see her, then and try to use her? ²⁵³That was my first thought. ²⁵⁴But now we come to a sinister fact. ²⁵⁵Miss Burnet has not been seen by any human eye since the night of the murder. ²⁵⁶From that evening she has utterly vanished. ²⁵⁷Is she alive? ²⁵⁸Has she perhaps met her end on the same night as the friend whom she had summoned? ²⁵⁹Or is she merely a prisoner? ²⁶⁰There is the point which we still have to decide.

²⁶¹“You will appreciate the difficulty of the situation, Watson. ²⁶²There is nothing upon which we can apply for a warrant. ²⁶³Our whole scheme might seem fantastic if laid before a magistrate. ²⁶⁴The woman's disappearance counts for nothing, since in that extraordinary household any member of it

might be invisible for a week. ²⁶⁵And yet she may at the present moment be in danger of her life. ²⁶⁶All I can do is to watch the house and leave my agent, Warner, on guard at the gates. ²⁶⁷We can't let such a situation continue. ²⁶⁸If the law can do nothing we must take the risk ourselves."

²⁶⁹"What do you suggest?"

²⁷⁰"I know which is her room. ²⁷¹It is accessible from the top of an outhouse. ²⁷²My suggestion is that you and I go to-night and see if we can strike at the very heart of the mystery."

²⁷³It was not, I must confess, a very alluring prospect. ²⁷⁴The old house with its atmosphere of murder, the singular and formidable inhabitants, the unknown dangers of the approach, and the fact that we were putting ourselves legally in a false position all combined to damp my ardour. ²⁷⁵But there was something in the ice-cold reasoning of Holmes which made it impossible to shrink from any adventure which he might recommend. ²⁷⁶One knew that thus, and only thus, could a solution be found. ²⁷⁷I clasped his hand in silence, and the die was cast.

²⁷⁸But it was not destined that our investigation should have so adventurous an ending. ²⁷⁹It was about five o'clock, and the shadows of the March evening were beginning to fall, when an excited rustic rushed into our room.

²⁸⁰"They've gone, Mr. Holmes. ²⁸¹They went by the last train. ²⁸²The lady broke away, and I've got her in a cab downstairs."

²⁸³"Excellent, Warner!" cried Holmes, springing to his feet. ²⁸⁴"Watson, the gaps are closing rapidly."

²⁸⁵In the cab was a woman, half-collapsed from nervous exhaustion. ²⁸⁶She bore upon her aquiline and emaciated face the traces of some recent tragedy. ²⁸⁷Her head hung listlessly upon her breast, but as she raised it and turned her dull eyes upon us I saw that her pupils were dark dots in the centre of the broad gray iris. ²⁸⁸She was drugged with opium.

²⁸⁹"I watched at the gate, same as you advised, Mr. Holmes," said our emissary, the discharged gardener. ²⁹⁰"When the carriage came out I followed it to the station. ²⁹¹She was like one walking in her sleep, but when they tried to get her into the train she came to life and struggled. ²⁹²They pushed her into the carriage. ²⁹³She fought her way out again. ²⁹⁴I took her part, got her into a cab, and here we are. ²⁹⁵I shan't forget the face at the carriage window as I led her away. ²⁹⁶I'd have a short life if he had his way—the black-eyed, scowling, yellow devil."

²⁹⁷We carried her upstairs, laid her on the sofa, and a couple of cups of the strongest coffee soon cleared her brain from the mists of the drug. ²⁹⁸Baynes had been summoned by Holmes, and the situation rapidly explained to him.

²⁹⁹"Why, sir, you've got me the very evidence I want," said the inspector warmly, shaking my friend by the hand. ³⁰⁰"I was on the same scent as you from the first."

³⁰¹"What! ³⁰²You were after Henderson?"

³⁰³"Why, Mr. Holmes, when you were crawling in the shrubbery at High Gable I was up one of the trees in the plantation and saw you down below. ³⁰⁴It was just who would get his evidence first."

³⁰⁵"Then why did you arrest the mulatto?"

³⁰⁶Baynes chuckled.

³⁰⁷"I was sure Henderson, as he calls himself, felt that he was suspected, and that he would lie low and make no move so long as he thought he was in any danger. ³⁰⁸I arrested the wrong man to make him believe that our eyes were off him. ³⁰⁹I knew he would be likely to clear off then and give us a chance of getting at Miss Burnet."

³¹⁰Holmes laid his hand upon the inspector's shoulder.

³¹¹"You will rise high in your profession. ³¹²You have instinct and intuition," said he.

³¹³Baynes flushed with pleasure.

³¹⁴"I've had a plain-clothes man waiting at the station all the week. ³¹⁵Wherever the High Gable folk go he will keep them in sight. ³¹⁶But he must have been hard put to it when Miss Burnet broke away. ³¹⁷However, your man picked her up, and it all ends well. ³¹⁸We can't arrest without her evidence, that is clear, so the sooner we get a statement the better."

³¹⁹"Every minute she gets stronger," said Holmes, glancing at the governess. ³²⁰"But tell me, Baynes, who is this man Henderson?"

³²¹"Henderson," the inspector answered, "is Don Murillo, once called the Tiger of San Pedro."

³²²The Tiger of San Pedro! ³²³The whole history of the man came back to me in a flash. ³²⁴He had made his name as the most lewd and bloodthirsty tyrant that had ever governed any country with a pretence to civilization. ³²⁵Strong, fearless, and energetic, he had sufficient virtue to enable him to impose his odious vices upon a cowering people for ten or twelve years. ³²⁶His name was a terror through all Central America. ³²⁷At the end of that time there was a universal rising against him. ³²⁸But he was as cunning as he was cruel, and at the first whisper of coming trouble he had secretly conveyed his treasures aboard a ship which was manned by devoted adherents. ³²⁹It was an empty palace which was stormed by the insurgents next day. ³³⁰The dictator, his two children, his secretary, and his wealth had all escaped them. ³³¹From that moment he had vanished from the world, and his identity had been a frequent subject for comment in the European press.

³³²"Yes, sir, Don Murillo, the Tiger of San Pedro," said Baynes. ³³³"If you look it up you will find that the San Pedro colours are green and white, same as in the note, Mr. Holmes. ³³⁴Henderson he called himself, but I traced him back, Paris and Rome and Madrid to Barcelona, where his ship came in in '86. ³³⁵They've been looking for him all the time for their revenge, but it is only now that they have begun to find him out."

³³⁶"They discovered him a year ago," said Miss Burnet, who had sat up and was now intently following the conversation. ³³⁷"Once already his life has been attempted, but some evil spirit shielded him. ³³⁸Now, again, it is the noble, chivalrous Garcia who has fallen, while the monster goes safe. ³³⁹But another will come, and yet another, until some day justice will be done; that is as certain as the rise of to-morrow's sun." ³⁴⁰Her thin hands clenched, and her worn face blanched with the passion of her hatred.

³⁴¹"But how come you into this matter, Miss Burnet?" asked Holmes. ³⁴²"How can an English lady join in such a murderous affair?"

³⁴³"I join in it because there is no other way in the world by which justice can be gained. ³⁴⁴What does the law of England care for the rivers of blood shed years ago in San Pedro, or for the shipload of treasure which this man has stolen? ³⁴⁵To you they are like crimes committed in some other planet. ³⁴⁶But we know. ³⁴⁷We have learned the truth in sorrow and in suffering. ³⁴⁸To us there is no fiend in hell like Juan Murillo, and no peace in life while his victims still cry for vengeance."

³⁴⁹"No doubt," said Holmes, "he was as you say. ³⁵⁰I have heard that he was atrocious. ³⁵¹But how are you affected?"

³⁵²"I will tell you it all. ³⁵³This villain's policy was to murder, on one pretext or another, every man who showed such promise that he might in time come to be a dangerous rival. ³⁵⁴My husband—yes, my real name is Signora Victor Durando—was the San Pedro minister in London. ³⁵⁵He met me and married me there. ³⁵⁶A nobler man never lived upon earth. ³⁵⁷Unhappily, Murillo heard of his excellence,

recalled him on some pretext, and had him shot. ³⁵⁸With a premonition of his fate he had refused to take me with him. ³⁵⁹His estates were confiscated, and I was left with a pittance and a broken heart.

³⁶⁰“Then came the downfall of the tyrant. ³⁶¹He escaped as you have just described. ³⁶²But the many whose lives he had ruined, whose nearest and dearest had suffered torture and death at his hands, would not let the matter rest. ³⁶³They banded themselves into a society which should never be dissolved until the work was done. ³⁶⁴It was my part after we had discovered in the transformed Henderson the fallen despot, to attach myself to his household and keep the others in touch with his movements. ³⁶⁵This I was able to do by securing the position of governess in his family. ³⁶⁶He little knew that the woman who faced him at every meal was the woman whose husband he had hurried at an hour's notice into eternity. ³⁶⁷I smiled on him, did my duty to his children, and bided my time. ³⁶⁸An attempt was made in Paris and failed. ³⁶⁹We zig-zagged swiftly here and there over Europe to throw off the pursuers and finally returned to this house, which he had taken upon his first arrival in England.

³⁷⁰“But here also the ministers of justice were waiting. ³⁷¹Knowing that he would return there, Garcia, who is the son of the former highest dignitary in San Pedro, was waiting with two trusty companions of humble station, all three fired with the same reasons for revenge. ³⁷²He could do little during the day, for Murillo took every precaution and never went out save with his satellite Lucas, or Lopez as he was known in the days of his greatness. ³⁷³At night, however, he slept alone, and the avenger might find him. ³⁷⁴On a certain evening, which had been prearranged, I sent my friend final instructions, for the man was forever on the alert and continually changed his room. ³⁷⁵I was to see that the doors were open and the signal of a green or white light in a window which faced the drive was to give notice if all was safe or if the attempt had better be postponed.

³⁷⁶“But everything went wrong with us. ³⁷⁷In some way I had excited the suspicion of Lopez, the secretary. ³⁷⁸He crept up behind me and sprang upon me just as I had finished the note. ³⁷⁹He and his master dragged me to my room and held judgment upon me as a convicted traitress. ³⁸⁰Then and there they would have plunged their knives into me could they have seen how to escape the consequences of the deed. ³⁸¹Finally, after much debate, they concluded that my murder was too dangerous. ³⁸²But they determined to get rid forever of Garcia. ³⁸³They had gagged me, and Murillo twisted my arm round until I gave him the address. ³⁸⁴I swear that he might have twisted it off had I understood what it would mean to Garcia. ³⁸⁵Lopez addressed the note which I had written, sealed it with his sleeve-link, and sent it by the hand of the servant, Jose. ³⁸⁶How they murdered him I do not know, save that it was Murillo's hand who struck him down, for Lopez had remained to guard me. ³⁸⁷I believe he must have waited among the gorse bushes through which the path winds and struck him down as he passed. ³⁸⁸At first they were of a mind to let him enter the house and to kill him as a detected burglar; but they argued that if they were mixed up in an inquiry their own identity would at once be publicly disclosed and they would be open to further attacks. ³⁸⁹With the death of Garcia, the pursuit might cease, since such a death might frighten others from the task.

³⁹⁰“All would now have been well for them had it not been for my knowledge of what they had done. ³⁹¹I have no doubt that there were times when my life hung in the balance. ³⁹²I was confined to my room, terrorized by the most horrible threats, cruelly ill-used to break my spirit—see this stab on my shoulder and the bruises from end to end of my arms—and a gag was thrust into my mouth on the one occasion when I tried to call from the window. ³⁹³For five days this cruel imprisonment continued, with hardly enough food to hold body and soul together. ³⁹⁴This afternoon a good lunch was brought me, but the moment after I took it I knew that I had been drugged. ³⁹⁵In a sort of dream I remember being half-led, half-carried to the carriage; in the same state I was conveyed to the train. ³⁹⁶Only then, when the wheels were almost moving, did I suddenly realize that my liberty lay in my own hands. ³⁹⁷I sprang out, they tried to drag me back, and had it not been for the help of this good man, who led me to the cab, I should never have broken away. ³⁹⁸Now, thank God, I am beyond their power forever.”

³⁹⁹We had all listened intently to this remarkable statement. ⁴⁰⁰It was Holmes who broke the silence.

⁴⁰¹“Our difficulties are not over,” he remarked, shaking his head. ⁴⁰²“Our police work ends, but our legal work begins.”

⁴⁰³“Exactly,” said I. ⁴⁰⁴“A plausible lawyer could make it out as an act of self-defence. ⁴⁰⁵There may be a hundred crimes in the background, but it is only on this one that they can be tried.”

⁴⁰⁶“Come, come,” said Baynes cheerily, “I think better of the law than that. ⁴⁰⁷Self-defence is one thing. ⁴⁰⁸To entice a man in cold blood with the object of murdering him is another, whatever danger you may fear from him. ⁴⁰⁹No, no, we shall all be justified when we see the tenants of High Gable at the next Guildford Assizes.”

⁴¹⁰It is a matter of history, however, that a little time was still to elapse before the Tiger of San Pedro should meet with his deserts. ⁴¹¹Wily and bold, he and his companion threw their pursuer off their track by entering a lodging-house in Edmonton Street and leaving by the back-gate into Curzon Square. ⁴¹²From that day they were seen no more in England. ⁴¹³Some six months afterwards the Marquess of Montalva and Signor Rulli, his secretary, were both murdered in their rooms at the Hotel Escorial at Madrid. ⁴¹⁴The crime was ascribed to Nihilism, and the murderers were never arrested. ⁴¹⁵Inspector Baynes visited us at Baker Street with a printed description of the dark face of the secretary, and of the masterful features, the magnetic black eyes, and the tufted brows of his master. ⁴¹⁶We could not doubt that justice, if belated, had come at last.

⁴¹⁷“A chaotic case, my dear Watson,” said Holmes over an evening pipe. ⁴¹⁸“It will not be possible for you to present in that compact form which is dear to your heart. ⁴¹⁹It covers two continents, concerns two groups of mysterious persons, and is further complicated by the highly respectable presence of our friend, Scott Eccles, whose inclusion shows me that the deceased Garcia had a scheming mind and a well-developed instinct of self-preservation. ⁴²⁰It is remarkable only for the fact that amid a perfect jungle of possibilities we, with our worthy collaborator, the inspector, have kept our close hold on the essentials and so been guided along the crooked and winding path. ⁴²¹Is there any point which is not quite clear to you?”

⁴²²“The object of the mulatto cook's return?”

⁴²³“I think that the strange creature in the kitchen may account for it. ⁴²⁴The man was a primitive savage from the backwoods of San Pedro, and this was his fetish. ⁴²⁵When his companion and he had fled to some prearranged retreat—already occupied, no doubt by a confederate—the companion had persuaded him to leave so compromising an article of furniture. ⁴²⁶But the mulatto's heart was with it, and he was driven back to it next day, when, on reconnoitering through the window, he found policeman Walters in possession. ⁴²⁷He waited three days longer, and then his piety or his superstition drove him to try once more. ⁴²⁸Inspector Baynes, who, with his usual astuteness, had minimized the incident before me, had really recognized its importance and had left a trap into which the creature walked. ⁴²⁹Any other point, Watson?”

⁴³⁰“The torn bird, the pail of blood, the charred bones, all the mystery of that weird kitchen?”

⁴³¹Holmes smiled as he turned up an entry in his note-book.

⁴³²“I spent a morning in the British Museum reading up on that and other points. ⁴³³Here is a quotation from Eckermann's Voodooism and the Negroid Religions:

⁴³⁴“The true voodoo-worshipper attempts nothing of importance without certain sacrifices which are intended to propitiate his unclean gods. ⁴³⁵In extreme cases these rites take the form of human sacrifices followed by cannibalism. ⁴³⁶The more usual victims are a white cock, which is plucked in pieces alive, or a black goat, whose throat is cut and body burned.’

⁴³⁷“So you see our savage friend was very orthodox in his ritual. ⁴³⁸It is grotesque, Watson,” Holmes added, as he slowly fastened his notebook, “but, as I have had occasion to remark, there is but one step from the grotesque to the horrible.”

The Adventure of the Red Circle

Chapter I.

Part One

¹“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. ²I really have other things to engage me.” ³So spoke Sherlock Holmes and turned back to the great scrapbook in which he was arranging and indexing some of his recent material.

⁴But the landlady had the pertinacity and also the cunning of her sex. ⁵She held her ground firmly.

⁶“You arranged an affair for a lodger of mine last year,” she said—“Mr. Fairdale Hobbs.”

⁷“Ah, yes—a simple matter.”

⁸“But he would never cease talking of it—your kindness, sir, and the way in which you brought light into the darkness. ⁹I remembered his words when I was in doubt and darkness myself. ¹⁰I know you could if you only would.”

¹¹Holmes was accessible upon the side of flattery, and also, to do him justice, upon the side of kindliness.

¹²The two forces made him lay down his gum-brush with a sigh of resignation and push back his chair.

¹³“Well, well, Mrs. Warren, let us hear about it, then. ¹⁴You don't object to tobacco, I take it? ¹⁵Thank you, Watson—the matches! ¹⁶You are uneasy, as I understand, because your new lodger remains in his rooms and you cannot see him. ¹⁷Why, bless you, Mrs. Warren, if I were your lodger you often would not see me for weeks on end.”

¹⁸“No doubt, sir; but this is different. ¹⁹It frightens me, Mr. Holmes. ²⁰I can't sleep for fright. ²¹To 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. ²²My 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. ²³What is he hiding for? ²⁴What has he done? ²⁵Except for the girl, I am all alone in the house with him, and it's more than my nerves can stand.”

²⁶Holmes leaned forward and laid his long, thin fingers upon the woman's shoulder. ²⁷He had an almost hypnotic power of soothing when he wished. ²⁸The scared look faded from her eyes, and her agitated features smoothed into their usual commonplace. ²⁹She sat down in the chair which he had indicated.

³⁰“If I take it up I must understand every detail,” said he. ³¹“Take time to consider. ³²The smallest point may be the most essential. ³³You say that the man came ten days ago and paid you for a fortnight's board and lodging?”

³⁴“He asked my terms, sir. ³⁵I said fifty shillings a week. ³⁶There is a small sitting-room and bedroom, and all complete, at the top of the house.”

³⁷“Well?”

³⁸“He said, ‘I'll pay you five pounds a week if I can have it on my own terms.’ ³⁹I'm a poor woman, sir, and Mr. Warren earns little, and the money meant much to me. ⁴⁰He took out a ten-pound note, and he held it out to me then and there. ⁴¹‘You can have the same every fortnight for a long time to come if you keep the terms,’ he said. ⁴²‘If not, I'll have no more to do with you.’

⁴³“What were the terms?”

⁴⁴“Well, sir, they were that he was to have a key of the house. ⁴⁵That was all right. ⁴⁶Lodgers often have them. ⁴⁷Also, that he was to be left entirely to himself and never, upon any excuse, to be disturbed.”

⁴⁸“Nothing wonderful in that, surely?”

⁴⁹“Not in reason, sir. ⁵⁰But this is out of all reason. ⁵¹He has been there for ten days, and neither Mr. Warren, nor I, nor the girl has once set eyes upon him. ⁵²We 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.”

⁵³“Oh, he went out the first night, did he?”

⁵⁴“Yes, sir, and returned very late—after we were all in bed. ⁵⁵He told me after he had taken the rooms that he would do so and asked me not to bar the door. ⁵⁶I heard him come up the stair after midnight.”

⁵⁷“But his meals?”

⁵⁸“It was his particular direction that we should always, when he rang, leave his meal upon a chair, outside his door. ⁵⁹Then he rings again when he has finished, and we take it down from the same chair. ⁶⁰If he wants anything else he prints it on a slip of paper and leaves it.”

⁶¹“Prints it?”

⁶²“Yes, sir; prints it in pencil. ⁶³Just the word, nothing more. ⁶⁴Here's the one I brought to show you—soap. ⁶⁵Here's another—match. ⁶⁶This is one he left the first morning—daily gazette. ⁶⁷I leave that paper with his breakfast every morning.”

⁶⁸“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. ⁶⁹Seclusion I can understand; but why print? ⁷⁰Printing is a clumsy process. ⁷¹Why not write? ⁷²What would it suggest, Watson?”

⁷³“That he desired to conceal his handwriting.”

⁷⁴“But why? ⁷⁵What can it matter to him that his landlady should have a word of his writing? ⁷⁶Still, it may be as you say. ⁷⁷Then, again, why such laconic messages?”

⁷⁸“I cannot imagine.”

⁷⁹“It opens a pleasing field for intelligent speculation. ⁸⁰The words are written with a broad-pointed, violet-tinted pencil of a not unusual pattern. ⁸¹You 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. ⁸²Suggestive, Watson, is it not?”

⁸³“Of caution?”

⁸⁴“Exactly. ⁸⁵There was evidently some mark, some thumbprint, something which might give a clue to the person's identity. ⁸⁶Now. Mrs. Warren, you say that the man was of middle size, dark, and bearded. ⁸⁷What age would he be?”

⁸⁸“Youngish, sir—not over thirty.”

⁸⁹“Well, can you give me no further indications?”

⁹⁰“He spoke good English, sir, and yet I thought he was a foreigner by his accent.”

⁹¹“And he was well dressed?”

⁹²“Very smartly dressed, sir—quite the gentleman. ⁹³Dark clothes—nothing you would note.”

⁹⁴“He gave no name?”

⁹⁵“No, sir.”

⁹⁶“And has had no letters or callers?”

⁹⁷“None.”

⁹⁸“But surely you or the girl enter his room of a morning?”

⁹⁹“No, sir; he looks after himself entirely.”

¹⁰⁰“Dear me! that is certainly remarkable. ¹⁰¹What about his luggage?”

¹⁰²“He had one big brown bag with him—nothing else.”

¹⁰³“Well, we don't seem to have much material to help us. ¹⁰⁴Do you say nothing has come out of that room—absolutely nothing?”

¹⁰⁵The landlady drew an envelope from her bag; from it she shook out two burnt matches and a cigarette-end upon the table.

¹⁰⁶“They were on his tray this morning. ¹⁰⁷I brought them because I had heard that you can read great things out of small ones.”

¹⁰⁸Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

¹⁰⁹“There is nothing here,” said he. ¹¹⁰“The matches have, of course, been used to light cigarettes. ¹¹¹That is obvious from the shortness of the burnt end. ¹¹²Half the match is consumed in lighting a pipe or cigar. ¹¹³But, dear me! this cigarette stub is certainly remarkable. ¹¹⁴The gentleman was bearded and moustached, you say?”

¹¹⁵“Yes, sir.”

¹¹⁶“I don't understand that. ¹¹⁷I should say that only a clean-shaven man could have smoked this. ¹¹⁸Why, Watson, even your modest moustache would have been singed.”

¹¹⁹“A holder?” I suggested.

¹²⁰“No, no; the end is matted. ¹²¹I suppose there could not be two people in your rooms, Mrs. Warren?”

¹²²“No, sir. ¹²³He eats so little that I often wonder it can keep life in one.”

¹²⁴“Well, I think we must wait for a little more material. ¹²⁵After all, you have nothing to complain of. ¹²⁶You have received your rent, and he is not a troublesome lodger, though he is certainly an unusual one. ¹²⁷He pays you well, and if he chooses to lie concealed it is no direct business of yours. ¹²⁸We have no excuse for an intrusion upon his privacy until we have some reason to think that there is a guilty reason for it. ¹²⁹I've taken up the matter, and I won't lose sight of it. ¹³⁰Report to me if anything fresh occurs, and rely upon my assistance if it should be needed.

¹³¹“There are certainly some points of interest in this case, Watson,” he remarked when the landlady had left us. ¹³²“It may, of course, be trivial—individual eccentricity; or it may be very much deeper than appears on the surface. ¹³³The first thing that strike one is the obvious possibility that the person now in the rooms may be entirely different from the one who engaged them.”

¹³⁴“Why should you think so?”

¹³⁵“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? ¹³⁶He came back—or someone came back—when all witnesses were out of the way. ¹³⁷We have no proof that the person who came back was the person who went out. ¹³⁸Then, again, the man who took the rooms spoke English well. ¹³⁹This other, however, prints ‘match’

when it should have been ‘matches.’ ¹⁴⁰I can imagine that the word was taken out of a dictionary, which would give the noun but not the plural. ¹⁴¹The laconic style may be to conceal the absence of knowledge of English. ¹⁴²Yes, Watson, there are good reasons to suspect that there has been a substitution of lodgers.”

¹⁴³“But for what possible end?”

¹⁴⁴“Ah! there lies our problem. ¹⁴⁵There is one rather obvious line of investigation.” ¹⁴⁶He took down the great book in which, day by day, he filed the agony columns of the various London journals. ¹⁴⁷“Dear me!” said he, turning over the pages, “what a chorus of groans, cries, and bleatings! ¹⁴⁸What a rag-bag of singular happenings! ¹⁴⁹But surely the most valuable hunting-ground that ever was given to a student of the unusual! ¹⁵⁰This person is alone and cannot be approached by letter without a breach of that absolute secrecy which is desired. ¹⁵¹How is any news or any message to reach him from without? ¹⁵²Obviously by advertisement through a newspaper. ¹⁵³There seems no other way, and fortunately we need concern ourselves with the one paper only. ¹⁵⁴Here are the Daily Gazette extracts of the last fortnight. ¹⁵⁵‘Lady with a black boa at Prince’s Skating Club’—that we may pass. ¹⁵⁶‘Surely Jimmy will not break his mother’s heart’—that appears to be irrelevant. ¹⁵⁷‘If the lady who fainted on Brixton bus’—she does not interest me. ¹⁵⁸‘Every day my heart longs—’ ¹⁵⁹Bleat, Watson—unmitigated bleat! ¹⁶⁰Ah, this is a little more possible. ¹⁶¹Listen to this: ¹⁶²‘Be patient. ¹⁶³Will find some sure means of communications. ¹⁶⁴Meanwhile, this column. ¹⁶⁵G.’ ¹⁶⁶That is two days after Mrs. Warren’s lodger arrived. ¹⁶⁷It sounds plausible, does it not? ¹⁶⁸The mysterious one could understand English, even if he could not print it. ¹⁶⁹Let us see if we can pick up the trace again. ¹⁷⁰Yes, here we are—three days later. ¹⁷¹‘Am making successful arrangements. ¹⁷²Patience and prudence. ¹⁷³The clouds will pass. ¹⁷⁴G.’ ¹⁷⁵Nothing for a week after that. ¹⁷⁶Then comes something much more definite: ¹⁷⁷‘The path is clearing. ¹⁷⁸If I find chance signal message remember code agreed—One A, two B, and so on. ¹⁷⁹You will hear soon. ¹⁸⁰G.’ ¹⁸¹That was in yesterday’s paper, and there is nothing in to-day’s. ¹⁸²It’s all very appropriate to Mrs. Warren’s lodger. ¹⁸³If we wait a little, Watson, I don’t doubt that the affair will grow more intelligible.”

¹⁸⁴So 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.

¹⁸⁵“How’s this, Watson?” he cried, picking up the paper from the table. ¹⁸⁶“‘High red house with white stone facings. ¹⁸⁷Third floor. ¹⁸⁸Second window left. ¹⁸⁹After dusk. ¹⁹⁰G.’ ¹⁹¹That is definite enough. ¹⁹²I think after breakfast we must make a little reconnaissance of Mrs. Warren’s neighbourhood. ¹⁹³Ah, Mrs. Warren! what news do you bring us this morning?”

¹⁹⁴Our client had suddenly burst into the room with an explosive energy which told of some new and momentous development.

¹⁹⁵“It’s a police matter, Mr. Holmes!” she cried. ¹⁹⁶“I’ll have no more of it! ¹⁹⁷He shall pack out of there with his baggage. ¹⁹⁸I would have gone straight up and told him so, only I thought it was but fair to you to take your opinion first. ¹⁹⁹But I’m at the end of my patience, and when it comes to knocking my old man about—”

²⁰⁰“Knocking Mr. Warren about?”

²⁰¹“Using him roughly, anyway.”

²⁰²“But who used him roughly?”

²⁰³“Ah! that’s what we want to know! ²⁰⁴It was this morning, sir. ²⁰⁵Mr. Warren is a timekeeper at Morton and Waylight’s, in Tottenham Court Road. ²⁰⁶He has to be out of the house before seven. ²⁰⁷Well, 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. ²⁰⁸They drove him an hour, and then

opened the door and shot him out. ²⁰⁹He lay in the roadway so shaken in his wits that he never saw what became of the cab. ²¹⁰When 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.”

²¹¹“Most interesting,” said Holmes. ²¹²“Did he observe the appearance of these men—did he hear them talk?”

²¹³“No; he is clean dazed. ²¹⁴He just knows that he was lifted up as if by magic and dropped as if by magic. ²¹⁵Two at least were in it, and maybe three.”

²¹⁶“And you connect this attack with your lodger?”

²¹⁷“Well, we’ve lived there fifteen years and no such happenings ever came before. ²¹⁸I’ve had enough of him. ²¹⁹Money’s not everything. ²²⁰I’ll have him out of my house before the day is done.”

²²¹“Wait a bit, Mrs. Warren. ²²²Do nothing rash. ²²³I begin to think that this affair may be very much more important than appeared at first sight. ²²⁴It is clear now that some danger is threatening your lodger. ²²⁵It is equally clear that his enemies, lying in wait for him near your door, mistook your husband for him in the foggy morning light. ²²⁶On discovering their mistake they released him. ²²⁷What they would have done had it not been a mistake, we can only conjecture.”

²²⁸“Well, what am I to do, Mr. Holmes?”

²²⁹“I have a great fancy to see this lodger of yours, Mrs. Warren.”

²³⁰“I don’t see how that is to be managed, unless you break in the door. ²³¹I always hear him unlock it as I go down the stair after I leave the tray.”

²³²“He has to take the tray in. ²³³Surely we could conceal ourselves and see him do it.”

²³⁴The landlady thought for a moment.

²³⁵“Well, sir, there’s the box-room opposite. ²³⁶I could arrange a looking-glass, maybe, and if you were behind the door—”

²³⁷“Excellent!” said Holmes. ²³⁸“When does he lunch?”

²³⁹“About one, sir.”

²⁴⁰“Then Dr. Watson and I will come round in time. ²⁴¹For the present, Mrs. Warren, good-bye.”

²⁴²At 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. ²⁴³Standing as it does near the corner of the street, it commands a view down Howe Street, with its ore pretentious houses. ²⁴⁴Holmes 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.

²⁴⁵“See, Watson!” said he. ²⁴⁶“‘High red house with stone facings.’ ²⁴⁷There is the signal station all right. ²⁴⁸We know the place, and we know the code; so surely our task should be simple. ²⁴⁹There’s a ‘to let’ card in that window. ²⁵⁰It is evidently an empty flat to which the confederate has access. ²⁵¹Well, Mrs. Warren, what now?”

²⁵²“I have it all ready for you. ²⁵³If you will both come up and leave your boots below on the landing, I’ll put you there now.”

²⁵⁴It was an excellent hiding-place which she had arranged. ²⁵⁵The mirror was so placed that, seated in the dark, we could very plainly see the door opposite. ²⁵⁶We had hardly settled down in it, and Mrs. Warren left us, when a distant tinkle announced that our mysterious neighbour had rung. ²⁵⁷Presently

the landlady appeared with the tray, laid it down upon a chair beside the closed door, and then, treading heavily, departed. ²⁵⁸Crouching together in the angle of the door, we kept our eyes fixed upon the mirror. ²⁵⁹Suddenly, 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. ²⁶⁰An 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. ²⁶¹Then the door crashed to, the key turned once more, and all was silence. ²⁶²Holmes twitched my sleeve, and together we stole down the stair.

²⁶³"I will call again in the evening," said he to the expectant landlady. ²⁶⁴"I think, Watson, we can discuss this business better in our own quarters."

²⁶⁵"My surmise, as you saw, proved to be correct," said he, speaking from the depths of his easy-chair.

²⁶⁶"There has been a substitution of lodgers. ²⁶⁷What I did not foresee is that we should find a woman, and no ordinary woman, Watson."

²⁶⁸"She saw us."

²⁶⁹"Well, she saw something to alarm her. ²⁷⁰That is certain. ²⁷¹The general sequence of events is pretty clear, is it not? ²⁷²A couple seek refuge in London from a very terrible and instant danger. ²⁷³The measure of that danger is the rigour of their precautions. ²⁷⁴The man, who has some work which he must do, desires to leave the woman in absolute safety while he does it. ²⁷⁵It 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. ²⁷⁶The printed messages, as is now evident, were to prevent her sex being discovered by her writing. ²⁷⁷The man cannot come near the woman, or he will guide their enemies to her. ²⁷⁸Since he cannot communicate with her direct, he has recourse to the agony column of a paper. ²⁷⁹So far all is clear."

²⁸⁰"But what is at the root of it?"

²⁸¹"Ah, yes, Watson—severely practical, as usual! ²⁸²What is at the root of it all? ²⁸³Mrs. Warren's whimsical problem enlarges somewhat and assumes a more sinister aspect as we proceed. ²⁸⁴This much we can say: that it is no ordinary love escapade. ²⁸⁵You saw the woman's face at the sign of danger. ²⁸⁶We have heard, too, of the attack upon the landlord, which was undoubtedly meant for the lodger. ²⁸⁷These alarms, and the desperate need for secrecy, argue that the matter is one of life or death. ²⁸⁸The 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. ²⁸⁹It is very curious and complex, Watson."

²⁹⁰"Why should you go further in it? ²⁹¹What have you to gain from it?"

²⁹²"What, indeed? ²⁹³It is art for art's sake, Watson. ²⁹⁴I suppose when you doctored you found yourself studying cases without thought of a fee?"

²⁹⁵"For my education, Holmes."

²⁹⁶"Education never ends, Watson. ²⁹⁷It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last. ²⁹⁸This is an instructive case. ²⁹⁹There is neither money nor credit in it, and yet one would wish to tidy it up. ³⁰⁰When dusk comes we should find ourselves one stage advanced in our investigation."

³⁰¹When 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. ³⁰²As we peered from the darkened sitting-room of the lodging-house, one more dim light glimmered high up through the obscurity.

³⁰³"Someone is moving in that room," said Holmes in a whisper, his gaunt and eager face thrust forward to the window-pane. ³⁰⁴"Yes, I can see his shadow. ³⁰⁵There he is again! ³⁰⁶He has a candle in his hand. ³⁰⁷Now he is peering across. ³⁰⁸He wants to be sure that she is on the lookout. ³⁰⁹Now he begins to flash.

³¹⁰Take the message also, Watson, that we may check each other. ³¹¹A single flash—that is A, surely. ³¹²Now, then. ³¹³How many did you make it? ³¹⁴Twenty. ³¹⁵Do did In. ³¹⁶That should mean T. ³¹⁷AT—that's intelligible enough. ³¹⁸Another T. ³¹⁹Surely this is the beginning of a second word. ³²⁰Now, then—TENTA. ³²¹Dead stop. ³²²That can't be all, Watson? ³²³ATTENTA gives no sense. ³²⁴Nor is it any better as three words AT, TEN, TA, unless T. A. are a person's initials. ³²⁵There it goes again! ³²⁶What's that? ³²⁷ATTE—why, it is the same message over again. ³²⁸Curious, Watson, very curious. ³²⁹Now he is off once more! ³³⁰AT—why he is repeating it for the third time. ³³¹ATTENTA three times! ³³²How often will he repeat it? ³³³No, that seems to be the finish. ³³⁴He has withdrawn from the window. ³³⁵What do you make of it, Watson?"

³³⁶"A cipher message, Holmes."

³³⁷My companion gave a sudden chuckle of comprehension. ³³⁸"And not a very obscure cipher, Watson," said he. ³³⁹"Why, of course, it is Italian! ³⁴⁰The A means that it is addressed to a woman. ³⁴¹'Beware! ³⁴²Beware! ³⁴³Beware!' ³⁴⁴How's that, Watson?

³⁴⁵"I believe you have hit it."

³⁴⁶"Not a doubt of it. ³⁴⁷It is a very urgent message, thrice repeated to make it more so. ³⁴⁸But beware of what? ³⁴⁹Wait a bit, he is coming to the window once more."

³⁵⁰Again we saw the dim silhouette of a crouching man and the whisk of the small flame across the window as the signals were renewed. ³⁵¹They came more rapidly than before—so rapid that it was hard to follow them.

³⁵²"PERICOLO—pericolo—eh, what's that, Watson? ³⁵³'Danger,' isn't it? ³⁵⁴Yes, by Jove, it's a danger signal. ³⁵⁵There he goes again! ³⁵⁶PERI. ³⁵⁷Halloa, what on earth—"

³⁵⁸The 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. ³⁵⁹That last warning cry had been suddenly cut short. ³⁶⁰How, and by whom? ³⁶¹The same thought occurred on the instant to us both. ³⁶²Holmes sprang up from where he crouched by the window.

³⁶³"This is serious, Watson," he cried. ³⁶⁴"There is some devilry going forward! ³⁶⁵Why should such a message stop in such a way? ³⁶⁶I should put Scotland Yard in touch with this business—and yet, it is too pressing for us to leave."

³⁶⁷"Shall I go for the police?"

³⁶⁸"We must define the situation a little more clearly. ³⁶⁹It may bear some more innocent interpretation. ³⁷⁰Come, Watson, let us go across ourselves and see what we can make of it."

Chapter II.

Part Two

¹As we walked rapidly down Howe Street I glanced back at the building which we had left. ²There, 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. ³At the doorway of the Howe Street flats a man, muffled in a cravat and greatcoat, was leaning against the railing. ⁴He started as the hall-light fell upon our faces.

⁵"Holmes!" he cried.

⁶"Why, Gregson!" said my companion as he shook hands with the Scotland Yard detective. ⁷"Journeys end with lovers' meetings. ⁸What brings you here?"

⁹"The same reasons that bring you, I expect," said Gregson. ¹⁰"How you got on to it I can't imagine."

¹¹"Different threads, but leading up to the same tangle. ¹²I've been taking the signals."

¹³"Signals?"

¹⁴"Yes, from that window. ¹⁵They broke off in the middle. ¹⁶We came over to see the reason. ¹⁷But since it is safe in your hands I see no object in continuing this business."

¹⁸"Wait a bit!" cried Gregson eagerly. ¹⁹"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. ²⁰There's only the one exit to these flats, so we have him safe."

²¹"Who is he?"

²²"Well, well, we score over you for once, Mr. Holmes. ²³You must give us best this time." ²⁴He 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. ²⁵"May I introduce you to Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" he said to the cabman. ²⁶"This is Mr. Leverton, of Pinkerton's American Agency."

²⁷"The hero of the Long Island cave mystery?" said Holmes. ²⁸"Sir, I am pleased to meet you."

²⁹The American, a quiet, businesslike young man, with a clean-shaven, hatchet face, flushed up at the words of commendation. ³⁰"I am on the trail of my life now, Mr. Holmes," said he. ³¹"If I can get Gorgiano—"

³²"What! ³³Gorgiano of the Red Circle?"

³⁴"Oh, he has a European fame, has he? ³⁵Well, we've learned all about him in America. ³⁶We know he is at the bottom of fifty murders, and yet we have nothing positive we can take him on. ³⁷I 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. ³⁸Mr. Gregson and I ran him to ground in that big tenement house, and there's only one door, so he can't slip us. ³⁹There's three folk come out since he went in, but I'll swear he wasn't one of them."

⁴⁰"Mr. Holmes talks of signals," said Gregson. ⁴¹"I expect, as usual, he knows a good deal that we don't."

⁴²In a few clear words Holmes explained the situation as it had appeared to us. ⁴³The American struck his hands together with vexation.

⁴⁴“He's on to us!” he cried.

⁴⁵“Why do you think so?”

⁴⁶“Well, it figures out that way, does it not? ⁴⁷Here he is, sending out messages to an accomplice—there are several of his gang in London. ⁴⁸Then suddenly, just as by your own account he was telling them that there was danger, he broke short off. ⁴⁹What 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? ⁵⁰What do you suggest, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵¹“That we go up at once and see for ourselves.”

⁵²“But we have no warrant for his arrest.”

⁵³“He is in unoccupied premises under suspicious circumstances,” said Gregson. ⁵⁴“That is good enough for the moment. ⁵⁵When we have him by the heels we can see if New York can't help us to keep him. ⁵⁶I'll take the responsibility of arresting him now.”

⁵⁷Our official detectives may blunder in the matter of intelligence, but never in that of courage. ⁵⁸Gregson 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. ⁵⁹The Pinkerton man had tried to push past him, but Gregson had firmly elbowed him back. ⁶⁰London dangers were the privilege of the London force.

⁶¹The door of the left-hand flat upon the third landing was standing ajar. ⁶²Gregson pushed it open. ⁶³Within all was absolute silence and darkness. ⁶⁴I struck a match and lit the detective's lantern. ⁶⁵As I did so, and as the flicker steadied into a flame, we all gave a gasp of surprise. ⁶⁶On the deal boards of the carpetless floor there was outlined a fresh track of blood. ⁶⁷The red steps pointed towards us and led away from an inner room, the door of which was closed. ⁶⁸Gregson flung it open and held his light full blaze in front of him, while we all peered eagerly over his shoulders.

⁶⁹In 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. ⁷⁰His 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. ⁷¹Giant as he was, the man must have gone down like a pole-axed ox before that terrific blow. ⁷²Beside his right hand a most formidable horn-handled, two-edged dagger lay upon the floor, and near it a black kid glove.

⁷³“By George! it's Black Gorgiano himself!” cried the American detective. ⁷⁴“Someone has got ahead of us this time.”

⁷⁵“Here is the candle in the window, Mr. Holmes,” said Gregson. ⁷⁶“Why, whatever are you doing?”

⁷⁷Holmes had stepped across, had lit the candle, and was passing it backward and forward across the window-panes. ⁷⁸Then he peered into the darkness, blew the candle out, and threw it on the floor.

⁷⁹“I rather think that will be helpful,” said he. ⁸⁰He came over and stood in deep thought while the two professionals were examining the body. ⁸¹“You say that three people came out form the flat while you were waiting downstairs,” said he at last. ⁸²“Did you observe them closely?”

⁸³“Yes, I did.”

⁸⁴“Was there a fellow about thirty, black-bearded, dark, of middle size?”

⁸⁵“Yes; he was the last to pass me.”

⁸⁶“That is your man, I fancy. ⁸⁷I can give you his description, and we have a very excellent outline of his footmark. ⁸⁸That should be enough for you.”

⁸⁹“Not much, Mr. Holmes, among the millions of London.”

⁹⁰“Perhaps not. ⁹¹That is why I thought it best to summon this lady to your aid.”

⁹²We all turned round at the words. ⁹³There, framed in the doorway, was a tall and beautiful woman—the mysterious lodger of Bloomsbury. ⁹⁴Slowly 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.

⁹⁵“You have killed him!” she muttered. ⁹⁶“Oh, Dio mio, you have killed him!” ⁹⁷Then I heard a sudden sharp intake of her breath, and she sprang into the air with a cry of joy. ⁹⁸Round 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. ⁹⁹It was terrible and amazing to see such a woman so convulsed with joy at such a sight. ¹⁰⁰Suddenly she stopped and gazed at us all with a questioning stare.

¹⁰¹“But you! ¹⁰²You are police, are you not? ¹⁰³You have killed Giuseppe Gorgiano. ¹⁰⁴Is it not so?”

¹⁰⁵“We are police, madam.”

¹⁰⁶She looked round into the shadows of the room.

¹⁰⁷“But where, then, is Gennaro?” she asked. ¹⁰⁸“He is my husband, Gennaro Lucca. ¹⁰⁹I am Emilia Lucca, and we are both from New York. ¹¹⁰Where is Gennaro? ¹¹¹He called me this moment from this window, and I ran with all my speed.”

¹¹²“It was I who called,” said Holmes.

¹¹³“You! ¹¹⁴How could you call?”

¹¹⁵“Your cipher was not difficult, madam. ¹¹⁶Your presence here was desirable. ¹¹⁷I knew that I had only to flash ‘Vieni’ and you would surely come.”

¹¹⁸The beautiful Italian looked with awe at my companion.

¹¹⁹“I do not understand how you know these things,” she said. ¹²⁰“Giuseppe Gorgiano—how did he—” ¹²¹She paused, and then suddenly her face lit up with pride and delight. ¹²²“Now I see it! ¹²³My Gennaro! ¹²⁴My splendid, beautiful Gennaro, who has guarded me safe from all harm, he did it, with his own strong hand he killed the monster! ¹²⁵Oh, Gennaro, how wonderful you are! ¹²⁶What woman could every be worthy of such a man?”

¹²⁷“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.”

¹²⁸“One moment, Gregson,” said Holmes. ¹²⁹“I rather fancy that this lady may be as anxious to give us information as we can be to get it. ¹³⁰You understand, madam, that your husband will be arrested and tried for the death of the man who lies before us? ¹³¹What you say may be used in evidence. ¹³²But 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.”

¹³³“Now that Gorgiano is dead we fear nothing,” said the lady. ¹³⁴“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.”

¹³⁵“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.”

¹³⁶Half 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. ¹³⁷She spoke in rapid and fluent but very unconventional English, which, for the sake of clearness, I will make grammatical.

¹³⁸"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. ¹³⁹Gennaro was in my father's employment, and I came to love him, as any woman must. ¹⁴⁰He had neither money nor position—nothing but his beauty and strength and energy—so my father forbade the match. ¹⁴¹We fled together, were married at Bari, and sold my jewels to gain the money which would take us to America. ¹⁴²This was four years ago, and we have been in New York ever since.

¹⁴³"Fortune was very good to us at first. ¹⁴⁴Gennaro 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. ¹⁴⁵His 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. ¹⁴⁶Signor Zamba is an invalid, and our new friend Castalotte has all power within the firm, which employs more than three hundred men. ¹⁴⁷He took my husband into his employment, made him head of a department, and showed his good-will towards him in every way. ¹⁴⁸Signor 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. ¹⁴⁹We 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.

¹⁵⁰"One night, when Gennaro returned from his work, he brought a fellow-countryman back with him. ¹⁵¹His name was Gorgiano, and he had come also from Posilippo. ¹⁵²He was a huge man, as you can testify, for you have looked upon his corpse. ¹⁵³Not only was his body that of a giant but everything about him was grotesque, gigantic, and terrifying. ¹⁵⁴His voice was like thunder in our little house. ¹⁵⁵There was scarce room for the whirl of his great arms as he talked. ¹⁵⁶His thoughts, his emotions, his passions, all were exaggerated and monstrous. ¹⁵⁷He talked, or rather roared, with such energy that others could but sit and listen, cowed with the mighty stream of words. ¹⁵⁸His eyes blazed at you and held you at his mercy. ¹⁵⁹He was a terrible and wonderful man. ¹⁶⁰I thank God that he is dead!

¹⁶¹"He came again and again. ¹⁶²Yet I was aware that Gennaro was no more happy than I was in his presence. ¹⁶³My poor husband would sit pale and listless, listening to the endless raving upon politics and upon social questions which made up or visitor's conversation. ¹⁶⁴Gennaro said nothing, but I, who knew him so well, could read in his face some emotion which I had never seen there before. ¹⁶⁵At first I thought that it was dislike. ¹⁶⁶And then, gradually, I understood that it was more than dislike. ¹⁶⁷It was fear—a deep, secret, shrinking fear. ¹⁶⁸That 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.

¹⁶⁹"He told me, and my own heart grew cold as ice as I listened. ¹⁷⁰My 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. ¹⁷¹The oaths and secrets of this brotherhood were frightful, but once within its rule no escape was possible. ¹⁷²When we had fled to America Gennaro thought that he had cast it all off forever. ¹⁷³What 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! ¹⁷⁴He 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. ¹⁷⁵All 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.

¹⁷⁶“That was bad enough, but worse was to come. ¹⁷⁷I 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. ¹⁷⁸One night his secret came out. ¹⁷⁹I had awakened what he called ‘love’ within him—the love of a brute—a savage. ¹⁸⁰Gennaro had not yet returned when he came. ¹⁸¹He 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. ¹⁸²I was struggling and screaming when Gennaro entered and attacked him. ¹⁸³He struck Gennaro senseless and fled from the house which he was never more to enter. ¹⁸⁴It was a deadly enemy that we made that night.

¹⁸⁵“A few days later came the meeting. ¹⁸⁶Gennaro returned from it with a face which told me that something dreadful had occurred. ¹⁸⁷It was worse than we could have imagined possible. ¹⁸⁸The funds of the society were raised by blackmailing rich Italians and threatening them with violence should they refuse the money. ¹⁸⁹It seems that Castalotte, our dear friend and benefactor, had been approached. ¹⁹⁰He had refused to yield to threats, and he had handed the notices to the police. ¹⁹¹It was resolved now that such an example should be made of them as would prevent any other victim from rebelling. ¹⁹²At the meeting it was arranged that he and his house should be blown up with dynamite. ¹⁹³There was a drawing of lots as to who should carry out the deed. ¹⁹⁴Gennaro saw our enemy's cruel face smiling at him as he dipped his hand in the bag. ¹⁹⁵No 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. ¹⁹⁶He was to kill his best friend, or he was to expose himself and me to the vengeance of his comrades. ¹⁹⁷It 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.

¹⁹⁸“All that night we sat together, our arms round each other, each strengthening each for the troubles that lay before us. ¹⁹⁹The very next evening had been fixed for the attempt. ²⁰⁰By 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.

²⁰¹“The rest, gentlemen, you know for yourselves. ²⁰²We were sure that our enemies would be behind us like our own shadows. ²⁰³Gorgiano had his private reasons for vengeance, but in any case we knew how ruthless, cunning, and untiring he could be. ²⁰⁴Both Italy and America are full of stories of his dreadful powers. ²⁰⁵If ever they were exerted it would be now. ²⁰⁶My 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. ²⁰⁷For his own part, he wished to be free that he might communicate both with the American and with the Italian police. ²⁰⁸I do not myself know where he lived, or how. ²⁰⁹All that I learned was through the columns of a newspaper. ²¹⁰But 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. ²¹¹Finally 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. ²¹²It 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. ²¹³And 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?”

²¹⁴“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.”

²¹⁵“She will have to come with me and see the chief,” Gregson answered. ²¹⁶“If what she says is corroborated, I do not think she or her husband has much to fear. ²¹⁷But what I can't make head or tail of, Mr. Holmes, is how on earth you got yourself mixed up in the matter.”

²¹⁸“Education, Gregson, education. ²¹⁹Still seeking knowledge at the old university. ²²⁰Well, Watson, you have one more specimen of the tragic and grotesque to add to your collection. ²²¹By the way, it is not eight o'clock, and a Wagner night at Covent Garden! ²²²If we hurry, we might be in time for the second act.”

The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

¹In the third week of November, in the year 1895, a dense yellow fog settled down upon London. ²From the Monday to the Thursday I doubt whether it was ever possible from our windows in Baker Street to see the loom of the opposite houses. ³The first day Holmes had spent in cross-indexing his huge book of references. ⁴The second and third had been patiently occupied upon a subject which he had recently made his hobby—the music of the Middle Ages. ⁵But when, for the fourth time, after pushing back our chairs from breakfast we saw the greasy, heavy brown swirl still drifting past us and condensing in oily drops upon the window-panes, my comrade's impatient and active nature could endure this drab existence no longer. ⁶He paced restlessly about our sitting-room in a fever of suppressed energy, biting his nails, tapping the furniture, and chafing against inaction.

⁷“Nothing of interest in the paper, Watson?” he said.

⁸I was aware that by anything of interest, Holmes meant anything of criminal interest. ⁹There was the news of a revolution, of a possible war, and of an impending change of government; but these did not come within the horizon of my companion. ¹⁰I could see nothing recorded in the shape of crime which was not commonplace and futile. ¹¹Holmes groaned and resumed his restless meanderings.

¹²“The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow,” said he in the querulous voice of the sportsman whose game has failed him. ¹³“Look out this window, Watson. ¹⁴See how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloud-bank. ¹⁵The thief or the murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim.”

¹⁶“There have,” said I, “been numerous petty thefts.”

¹⁷Holmes snorted his contempt.

¹⁸“This great and sombre stage is set for something more worthy than that,” said he. ¹⁹“It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal.”

²⁰“It is, indeed!” said I heartily.

²¹“Suppose that I were Brooks or Woodhouse, or any of the fifty men who have good reason for taking my life, how long could I survive against my own pursuit? ²²A summons, a bogus appointment, and all would be over. ²³It is well they don't have days of fog in the Latin countries—the countries of assassination. ²⁴By Jove! here comes something at last to break our dead monotony.”

²⁵It was the maid with a telegram. ²⁶Holmes tore it open and burst out laughing.

²⁷“Well, well! ²⁸What next?” said he. ²⁹“Brother Mycroft is coming round.”

³⁰“Why not?” I asked.

³¹“Why not? ³²It is as if you met a tram-car coming down a country lane. ³³Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. ³⁴His Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, Whitehall—that is his cycle. ³⁵Once, and only once, he has been here. ³⁶What upheaval can possibly have derailed him?”

³⁷“Does he not explain?”

³⁸Holmes handed me his brother's telegram.

³⁹Must see you over Cadogan West. ⁴⁰Coming at once.

⁴¹— Mycroft.

⁴²“Cadogen West? ⁴³I have heard the name.”

⁴⁴“It recalls nothing to my mind. ⁴⁵But that Mycroft should break out in this erratic fashion! ⁴⁶A planet might as well leave its orbit. ⁴⁷By the way, do you know what Mycroft is?”

⁴⁸I had some vague recollection of an explanation at the time of the Adventure of the Greek Interpreter.

⁴⁹“You told me that he had some small office under the British government.”

⁵⁰Holmes chuckled.

⁵¹“I did not know you quite so well in those days. ⁵²One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state. ⁵³You are right in thinking that he under the British government. ⁵⁴You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he is the British government.”

⁵⁵“My dear Holmes!”

⁵⁶“I thought I might surprise you. ⁵⁷Mycroft draws four hundred and fifty pounds a year, remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind, will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most indispensable man in the country.”

⁵⁸“But how?”

⁵⁹“Well, his position is unique. ⁶⁰He has made it for himself. ⁶¹There has never been anything like it before, nor will be again. ⁶²He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living. ⁶³The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. ⁶⁴The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearinghouse, which makes out the balance. ⁶⁵All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. ⁶⁶We will suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question; he could get his separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other. ⁶⁷They began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he has made himself an essential. ⁶⁸In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant. ⁶⁹Again and again his word has decided the national policy. ⁷⁰He lives in it. ⁷¹He thinks of nothing else save when, as an intellectual exercise, he unbends if I call upon him and ask him to advise me on one of my little problems. ⁷²But Jupiter is descending to-day. ⁷³What on earth can it mean? ⁷⁴Who is Cadogan West, and what is he to Mycroft?”

⁷⁵“I have it,” I cried, and plunged among the litter of papers upon the sofa. ⁷⁶“Yes, yes, here he is, sure enough! ⁷⁷Cadogen West was the young man who was found dead on the Underground on Tuesday morning.”

⁷⁸Holmes sat up at attention, his pipe halfway to his lips.

⁷⁹“This must be serious, Watson. ⁸⁰A death which has caused my brother to alter his habits can be no ordinary one. ⁸¹What in the world can he have to do with it? ⁸²The case was featureless as I remember it. ⁸³The young man had apparently fallen out of the train and killed himself. ⁸⁴He had not been robbed, and there was no particular reason to suspect violence. ⁸⁵Is that not so?”

⁸⁶“There has been an inquest,” said I, “and a good many fresh facts have come out. ⁸⁷Looked at more closely, I should certainly say that it was a curious case.”

⁸⁸“Judging by its effect upon my brother, I should think it must be a most extraordinary one.” ⁸⁹He snuggled down in his armchair. ⁹⁰“Now, Watson, let us have the facts.”

⁹¹“The man's name was Arthur Cadogan West. ⁹²He was twenty-seven years of age, unmarried, and a clerk at Woolwich Arsenal.”

⁹³“Government employ. ⁹⁴Behold the link with Brother Mycroft!”

⁹⁵“He left Woolwich suddenly on Monday night. ⁹⁶Was last seen by his fiancée, Miss Violet Westbury, whom he left abruptly in the fog about 7.30 that evening. ⁹⁷There was no quarrel between them and she can give no motive for his action. ⁹⁸The next thing heard of him was when his dead body was discovered by a plate-layer named Mason, just outside Aldgate Station on the Underground system in London.”

⁹⁹“When?”

¹⁰⁰“The body was found at six on Tuesday morning. ¹⁰¹It was lying wide of the metals upon the left hand of the track as one goes eastward, at a point close to the station, where the line emerges from the tunnel in which it runs. ¹⁰²The head was badly crushed—an injury which might well have been caused by a fall from the train. ¹⁰³The body could only have come on the line in that way. ¹⁰⁴Had it been carried down from any neighbouring street, it must have passed the station barriers, where a collector is always standing. ¹⁰⁵This point seems absolutely certain.”

¹⁰⁶“Very good. ¹⁰⁷The case is definite enough. ¹⁰⁸The man, dead or alive, either fell or was precipitated from a train. ¹⁰⁹So much is clear to me. ¹¹⁰Continue.”

¹¹¹“The trains which traverse the lines of rail beside which the body was found are those which run from west to east, some being purely Metropolitan, and some from Willesden and outlying junctions. ¹¹²It can be stated for certain that this young man, when he met his death, was travelling in this direction at some late hour of the night, but at what point he entered the train it is impossible to state.”

¹¹³“His ticket, of course, would show that.”

¹¹⁴“There was no ticket in his pockets.”

¹¹⁵“No ticket! ¹¹⁶Dear me, Watson, this is really very singular. ¹¹⁷According to my experience it is not possible to reach the platform of a Metropolitan train without exhibiting one's ticket. ¹¹⁸Presumably, then, the young man had one. ¹¹⁹Was it taken from him in order to conceal the station from which he came? ¹²⁰It is possible. ¹²¹Or did he drop it in the carriage? ¹²²That is also possible. ¹²³But the point is of curious interest. ¹²⁴I understand that there was no sign of robbery?”

¹²⁵“Apparently not. ¹²⁶There is a list here of his possessions. ¹²⁷His purse contained two pounds fifteen. ¹²⁸He had also a check-book on the Woolwich branch of the Capital and Counties Bank. ¹²⁹Through this his identity was established. ¹³⁰There were also two dress-circle tickets for the Woolwich Theatre, dated for that very evening. ¹³¹Also a small packet of technical papers.”

¹³²Holmes gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

¹³³“There we have it at last, Watson! ¹³⁴British government—Woolwich. ¹³⁵Arsenal—technical papers—Brother Mycroft, the chain is complete. ¹³⁶But here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to speak for himself.”

¹³⁷A moment later the tall and portly form of Mycroft Holmes was ushered into the room. ¹³⁸Heavily built and massive, there was a suggestion of uncouth physical inertia in the figure, but above this unwieldy frame there was perched a head so masterful in its brow, so alert in its steel-gray, deep-set eyes, so firm in its lips, and so subtle in its play of expression, that after the first glance one forgot the gross body and remembered only the dominant mind.

¹³⁹At his heels came our old friend Lestrade, of Scotland Yard—thin and austere. ¹⁴⁰The gravity of both their faces foretold some weighty quest. ¹⁴¹The detective shook hands without a word. ¹⁴²Mycroft Holmes struggled out of his overcoat and subsided into an armchair.

¹⁴³“A most annoying business, Sherlock,” said he. ¹⁴⁴“I extremely dislike altering my habits, but the powers that be would take no denial. ¹⁴⁵In the present state of Siam it is most awkward that I should be away from the office. ¹⁴⁶But it is a real crisis. ¹⁴⁷I have never seen the Prime Minister so upset. ¹⁴⁸As to the Admiralty—it is buzzing like an overturned bee-hive. ¹⁴⁹Have you read up the case?”

¹⁵⁰“We have just done so. ¹⁵¹What were the technical papers?”

¹⁵²“Ah, there's the point! ¹⁵³Fortunately, it has not come out. ¹⁵⁴The press would be furious if it did. ¹⁵⁵The papers which this wretched youth had in his pocket were the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine.”

¹⁵⁶Mycroft Holmes spoke with a solemnity which showed his sense of the importance of the subject. ¹⁵⁷His brother and I sat expectant.

¹⁵⁸“Surely you have heard of it? ¹⁵⁹I thought everyone had heard of it.”

¹⁶⁰“Only as a name.”

¹⁶¹“Its importance can hardly be exaggerated. ¹⁶²It has been the most jealously guarded of all government secrets. ¹⁶³You may take it from me that naval warfare becomes impossible within the radius of a Bruce-Partington's operation. ¹⁶⁴Two years ago a very large sum was smuggled through the Estimates and was expended in acquiring a monopoly of the invention. ¹⁶⁵Every effort has been made to keep the secret. ¹⁶⁶The plans, which are exceedingly intricate, comprising some thirty separate patents, each essential to the working of the whole, are kept in an elaborate safe in a confidential office adjoining the arsenal, with burglar-proof doors and windows. ¹⁶⁷Under no conceivable circumstances were the plans to be taken from the office. ¹⁶⁸If the chief constructor of the Navy desired to consult them, even he was forced to go to the Woolwich office for the purpose. ¹⁶⁹And yet here we find them in the pocket of a dead junior clerk in the heart of London. ¹⁷⁰From an official point of view it's simply awful.”

¹⁷¹“But you have recovered them?”

¹⁷²“No, Sherlock, no! ¹⁷³That's the pinch. ¹⁷⁴We have not. ¹⁷⁵Ten papers were taken from Woolwich. ¹⁷⁶There were seven in the pocket of Cadogan West. ¹⁷⁷The three most essential are gone—stolen, vanished. ¹⁷⁸You must drop everything, Sherlock. ¹⁷⁹Never mind your usual petty puzzles of the police-court. ¹⁸⁰It's a vital international problem that you have to solve. ¹⁸¹Why did Cadogan West take the papers, where are the missing ones, how did he die, how came his body where it was found, how can the evil be set right? ¹⁸²Find an answer to all these questions, and you will have done good service for your country.”

¹⁸³“Why do you not solve it yourself, Mycroft? ¹⁸⁴You can see as far as I.”

¹⁸⁵“Possibly, Sherlock. ¹⁸⁶But it is a question of getting details. ¹⁸⁷Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. ¹⁸⁸But to run here and run there, to cross-question railway guards, and lie on my face with a lens to my eye—it is not my *métier*. ¹⁸⁹No, you are the one man who can clear the matter up. ¹⁹⁰If you have a fancy to see your name in the next honours list—”

¹⁹¹My friend smiled and shook his head.

¹⁹²“I play the game for the game's own sake,” said he. ¹⁹³“But the problem certainly presents some points of interest, and I shall be very pleased to look into it. ¹⁹⁴Some more facts, please.”

¹⁹⁵“I have jotted down the more essential ones upon this sheet of paper, together with a few addresses which you will find of service. ¹⁹⁶The actual official guardian of the papers is the famous government expert, Sir James Walter, whose decorations and sub-titles fill two lines of a book of reference. ¹⁹⁷He has grown gray in the service, is a gentleman, a favoured guest in the most exalted houses, and, above

all, a man whose patriotism is beyond suspicion. ¹⁹⁸He is one of two who have a key of the safe. ¹⁹⁹I may add that the papers were undoubtedly in the office during working hours on Monday, and that Sir James left for London about three o'clock taking his key with him. ²⁰⁰He was at the house of Admiral Sinclair at Barclay Square during the whole of the evening when this incident occurred."

²⁰¹"Has the fact been verified?"

²⁰²"Yes; his brother, Colonel Valentine Walter, has testified to his departure from Woolwich, and Admiral Sinclair to his arrival in London; so Sir James is no longer a direct factor in the problem."

²⁰³"Who was the other man with a key?"

²⁰⁴"The senior clerk and draughtsman, Mr. Sidney Johnson. ²⁰⁵He is a man of forty, married, with five children. ²⁰⁶He is a silent, morose man, but he has, on the whole, an excellent record in the public service. ²⁰⁷He is unpopular with his colleagues, but a hard worker. ²⁰⁸According to his own account, corroborated only by the word of his wife, he was at home the whole of Monday evening after office hours, and his key has never left the watch-chain upon which it hangs."

²⁰⁹"Tell us about Cadogan West."

²¹⁰"He has been ten years in the service and has done good work. ²¹¹He has the reputation of being hot-headed and imperious, but a straight, honest man. ²¹²We have nothing against him. ²¹³He was next Sidney Johnson in the office. ²¹⁴His duties brought him into daily, personal contact with the plans. ²¹⁵No one else had the handling of them."

²¹⁶"Who locked up the plans that night?"

²¹⁷"Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk."

²¹⁸"Well, it is surely perfectly clear who took them away. ²¹⁹They are actually found upon the person of this junior clerk, Cadogan West. ²²⁰That seems final, does it not?"

²²¹"It does, Sherlock, and yet it leaves so much unexplained. ²²²In the first place, why did he take them?"

²²³"I presume they were of value?"

²²⁴"He could have got several thousands for them very easily."

²²⁵"Can you suggest any possible motive for taking the papers to London except to sell them?"

²²⁶"No, I cannot."

²²⁷"Then we must take that as our working hypothesis. ²²⁸Young West took the papers. ²²⁹Now this could only be done by having a false key—"

²³⁰"Several false keys. ²³¹He had to open the building and the room."

²³²"He had, then, several false keys. ²³³He took the papers to London to sell the secret, intending, no doubt, to have the plans themselves back in the safe next morning before they were missed. ²³⁴While in London on this treasonable mission he met his end."

²³⁵"How?"

²³⁶"We will suppose that he was travelling back to Woolwich when he was killed and thrown out of the compartment."

²³⁷"Aldgate, where the body was found, is considerably past the station London Bridge, which would be his route to Woolwich."

²³⁸“Many circumstances could be imagined under which he would pass London Bridge. ²³⁹There was someone in the carriage, for example, with whom he was having an absorbing interview. ²⁴⁰This interview led to a violent scene in which he lost his life. ²⁴¹Possibly he tried to leave the carriage, fell out on the line, and so met his end. ²⁴²The other closed the door. ²⁴³There was a thick fog, and nothing could be seen.”

²⁴⁴“No better explanation can be given with our present knowledge; and yet consider, Sherlock, how much you leave untouched. ²⁴⁵We will suppose, for argument's sake, that young Cadogan West had determined to convey these papers to London. ²⁴⁶He would naturally have made an appointment with the foreign agent and kept his evening clear. ²⁴⁷Instead of that he took two tickets for the theatre, escorted his fiancée halfway there, and then suddenly disappeared.”

²⁴⁸“A blind,” said Lestrade, who had sat listening with some impatience to the conversation.

²⁴⁹“A very singular one. ²⁵⁰That is objection No. 1. ²⁵¹Objection No. 2: ²⁵²We will suppose that he reaches London and sees the foreign agent. ²⁵³He must bring back the papers before morning or the loss will be discovered. ²⁵⁴He took away ten. ²⁵⁵Only seven were in his pocket. ²⁵⁶What had become of the other three? ²⁵⁷He certainly would not leave them of his own free will. ²⁵⁸Then, again, where is the price of his treason? ²⁵⁹Once would have expected to find a large sum of money in his pocket.”

²⁶⁰“It seems to me perfectly clear,” said Lestrade. ²⁶¹“I have no doubt at all as to what occurred. ²⁶²He took the papers to sell them. ²⁶³He saw the agent. ²⁶⁴They could not agree as to price. ²⁶⁵He started home again, but the agent went with him. ²⁶⁶In the train the agent murdered him, took the more essential papers, and threw his body from the carriage. ²⁶⁷That would account for everything, would it not?”

²⁶⁸“Why had he no ticket?”

²⁶⁹“The ticket would have shown which station was nearest the agent's house. ²⁷⁰Therefore he took it from the murdered man's pocket.”

²⁷¹“Good, Lestrade, very good,” said Holmes. ²⁷²“Your theory holds together. ²⁷³But if this is true, then the case is at an end. ²⁷⁴On the one hand, the traitor is dead. ²⁷⁵On the other, the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine are presumably already on the Continent. ²⁷⁶What is there for us to do?”

²⁷⁷“To act, Sherlock—to act!” cried Mycroft, springing to his feet. ²⁷⁸“All my instincts are against this explanation. ²⁷⁹Use your powers! ²⁸⁰Go to the scene of the crime! ²⁸¹See the people concerned! ²⁸²Leave no stone unturned! ²⁸³In all your career you have never had so great a chance of serving your country.”

²⁸⁴“Well, well!” said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. ²⁸⁵“Come, Watson! ²⁸⁶And you, Lestrade, could you favour us with your company for an hour or two? ²⁸⁷We will begin our investigation by a visit to Aldgate Station. ²⁸⁸Good-bye, Mycroft. ²⁸⁹I shall let you have a report before evening, but I warn you in advance that you have little to expect.”

²⁹⁰An hour later Holmes, Lestrade and I stood upon the Underground railroad at the point where it emerges from the tunnel immediately before Aldgate Station. ²⁹¹A courteous red-faced old gentleman represented the railway company.

²⁹²“This is where the young man's body lay,” said he, indicating a spot about three feet from the metals. ²⁹³“It could not have fallen from above, for these, as you see, are all blank walls. ²⁹⁴Therefore, it could only have come from a train, and that train, so far as we can trace it, must have passed about midnight on Monday.”

²⁹⁵“Have the carriages been examined for any sign of violence?”

²⁹⁶“There are no such signs, and no ticket has been found.”

²⁹⁷“No record of a door being found open?”

²⁹⁸“None.”

²⁹⁹“We have had some fresh evidence this morning,” said Lestrade. ³⁰⁰“A passenger who passed Aldgate in an ordinary Metropolitan train about 11.40 on Monday night declares that he heard a heavy thud, as of a body striking the line, just before the train reached the station. ³⁰¹There was dense fog, however, and nothing could be seen. ³⁰²He made no report of it at the time. ³⁰³Why, whatever is the matter with Mr. Holmes?”

³⁰⁴My friend was standing with an expression of strained intensity upon his face, staring at the railway metals where they curved out of the tunnel. ³⁰⁵Aldgate is a junction, and there was a network of points. ³⁰⁶On these his eager, questioning eyes were fixed, and I saw on his keen, alert face that tightening of the lips, that quiver of the nostrils, and concentration of the heavy, tufted brows which I knew so well.

³⁰⁷“Points,” he muttered; “the points.”

³⁰⁸“What of it? ³⁰⁹What do you mean?”

³¹⁰“I suppose there are no great number of points on a system such as this?”

³¹¹“No; they are very few.”

³¹²“And a curve, too. ³¹³Points, and a curve. ³¹⁴By Jove! if it were only so.”

³¹⁵“What is it, Mr. Holmes? ³¹⁶Have you a clue?”

³¹⁷“An idea—an indication, no more. ³¹⁸But the case certainly grows in interest. ³¹⁹Unique, perfectly unique, and yet why not? ³²⁰I do not see any indications of bleeding on the line.”

³²¹“There were hardly any.”

³²²“But I understand that there was a considerable wound.”

³²³“The bone was crushed, but there was no great external injury.”

³²⁴“And yet one would have expected some bleeding. ³²⁵Would it be possible for me to inspect the train which contained the passenger who heard the thud of a fall in the fog?”

³²⁶“I fear not, Mr. Holmes. ³²⁷The train has been broken up before now, and the carriages redistributed.”

³²⁸“I can assure you, Mr. Holmes,” said Lestrade, “that every carriage has been carefully examined. ³²⁹I saw to it myself.”

³³⁰It was one of my friend's most obvious weaknesses that he was impatient with less alert intelligences than his own.

³³¹“Very likely,” said he, turning away. ³³²“As it happens, it was not the carriages which I desired to examine. ³³³Watson, we have done all we can here. ³³⁴We need not trouble you any further, Mr. Lestrade.

³³⁵I think our investigations must now carry us to Woolwich.”

³³⁶At London Bridge, Holmes wrote a telegram to his brother, which he handed to me before dispatching it. ³³⁷It ran thus:

³³⁸See some light in the darkness, but it may possibly flicker out. ³³⁹Meanwhile, please send by messenger, to await return at Baker Street, a complete list of all foreign spies or international agents known to be in England, with full address.

³⁴⁰— Sherlock.

³⁴¹“That should be helpful, Watson,” he remarked as we took our seats in the Woolwich train. ³⁴²“We certainly owe Brother Mycroft a debt for having introduced us to what promises to be a really very remarkable case.”

³⁴³His eager face still wore that expression of intense and high-strung energy, which showed me that some novel and suggestive circumstance had opened up a stimulating line of thought. ³⁴⁴See the foxhound with hanging ears and drooping tail as it lolls about the kennels, and compare it with the same hound as, with gleaming eyes and straining muscles, it runs upon a breast-high scent—such was the change in Holmes since the morning. ³⁴⁵He was a different man from the limp and lounging figure in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown who had prowled so restlessly only a few hours before round the fog-girt room.

³⁴⁶“There is material here. ³⁴⁷There is scope,” said he. ³⁴⁸“I am dull indeed not to have understood its possibilities.”

³⁴⁹“Even now they are dark to me.”

³⁵⁰“The end is dark to me also, but I have hold of one idea which may lead us far. ³⁵¹The man met his death elsewhere, and his body was on the roof of a carriage.”

³⁵²“On the roof!”

³⁵³“Remarkable, is it not? ³⁵⁴But consider the facts. ³⁵⁵Is it a coincidence that it is found at the very point where the train pitches and sways as it comes round on the points? ³⁵⁶Is not that the place where an object upon the roof might be expected to fall off? ³⁵⁷The points would affect no object inside the train. ³⁵⁸Either the body fell from the roof, or a very curious coincidence has occurred. ³⁵⁹But now consider the question of the blood. ³⁶⁰Of course, there was no bleeding on the line if the body had bled elsewhere. ³⁶¹Each fact is suggestive in itself. ³⁶²Together they have a cumulative force.”

³⁶³“And the ticket, too!” I cried.

³⁶¹“Exactly. ³⁶²We could not explain the absence of a ticket. ³⁶³This would explain it. ³⁶⁴Everything fits together.”

³⁶⁵“But suppose it were so, we are still as far as ever from unravelling the mystery of his death. ³⁶⁶Indeed, it becomes not simpler but stranger.”

³⁶⁷“Perhaps,” said Holmes, thoughtfully, “perhaps.” ³⁶⁸He relapsed into a silent reverie, which lasted until the slow train drew up at last in Woolwich Station. ³⁶⁹There he called a cab and drew Mycroft's paper from his pocket.

³⁷⁰“We have quite a little round of afternoon calls to make,” said he. ³⁷¹“I think that Sir James Walter claims our first attention.”

³⁷²The house of the famous official was a fine villa with green lawns stretching down to the Thames. ³⁷³As we reached it the fog was lifting, and a thin, watery sunshine was breaking through. ³⁷⁴A butler answered our ring.

³⁷⁵“Sir James, sir!” said he with solemn face. ³⁷⁶“Sir James died this morning.”

³⁷⁷“Good heavens!” cried Holmes in amazement. ³⁷⁸“How did he die?”

³⁷⁹“Perhaps you would care to step in, sir, and see his brother, Colonel Valentine?”

³⁸⁰“Yes, we had best do so.”

³⁸¹We were ushered into a dim-lit drawing-room, where an instant later we were joined by a very tall, handsome, light-beared man of fifty, the younger brother of the dead scientist. ³⁸²His wild eyes, stained

cheeks, and unkempt hair all spoke of the sudden blow which had fallen upon the household. ³⁸³He was hardly articulate as he spoke of it.

³⁸⁴"It was this horrible scandal," said he. ³⁸⁵"My brother, Sir James, was a man of very sensitive honour, and he could not survive such an affair. ³⁸⁶It broke his heart. ³⁸⁷He was always so proud of the efficiency of his department, and this was a crushing blow."

³⁸⁸"We had hoped that he might have given us some indications which would have helped us to clear the matter up."

³⁸⁹"I assure you that it was all a mystery to him as it is to you and to all of us. ³⁹⁰He had already put all his knowledge at the disposal of the police. ³⁹¹Naturally he had no doubt that Cadogan West was guilty. ³⁹²But all the rest was inconceivable."

³⁹³"You cannot throw any new light upon the affair?"

³⁹⁴"I know nothing myself save what I have read or heard. ³⁹⁵I have no desire to be discourteous, but you can understand, Mr. Holmes, that we are much disturbed at present, and I must ask you to hasten this interview to an end."

³⁹⁶"This is indeed an unexpected development," said my friend when we had regained the cab. ³⁹⁷"I wonder if the death was natural, or whether the poor old fellow killed himself! ³⁹⁸If the latter, may it be taken as some sign of self-reproach for duty neglected? ³⁹⁹We must leave that question to the future. ⁴⁰⁰Now we shall turn to the Cadogan Wests."

⁴⁰¹A small but well-kept house in the outskirts of the town sheltered the bereaved mother. ⁴⁰²The old lady was too dazed with grief to be of any use to us, but at her side was a white-faced young lady, who introduced herself as Miss Violet Westbury, the fiancée of the dead man, and the last to see him upon that fatal night.

⁴⁰³"I cannot explain it, Mr. Holmes," she said. ⁴⁰⁴"I have not shut an eye since the tragedy, thinking, thinking, night and day, what the true meaning of it can be. ⁴⁰⁵Arthur was the most single-minded, chivalrous, patriotic man upon earth. ⁴⁰⁶He would have cut his right hand off before he would sell a State secret confided to his keeping. ⁴⁰⁷It is absurd, impossible, preposterous to anyone who knew him."

⁴⁰⁸"But the facts, Miss Westbury?"

⁴⁰⁹"Yes, yes; I admit I cannot explain them."

⁴¹⁰"Was he in any want of money?"

⁴¹¹"No; his needs were very simple and his salary ample. ⁴¹²He had saved a few hundreds, and we were to marry at the New Year."

⁴¹³"No signs of any mental excitement? ⁴¹⁴Come, Miss Westbury, be absolutely frank with us."

⁴¹⁵The quick eye of my companion had noted some change in her manner. ⁴¹⁶She coloured and hesitated.

⁴¹⁷"Yes," she said at last, "I had a feeling that there was something on his mind."

⁴¹⁸"For long?"

⁴¹⁹"Only for the last week or so. ⁴²⁰He was thoughtful and worried. ⁴²¹Once I pressed him about it. ⁴²²He admitted that there was something, and that it was concerned with his official life. ⁴²³It is too serious for me to speak about, even to you," said he. ⁴²⁴"I could get nothing more."

⁴²⁵Holmes looked grave.

⁴²⁶“Go on, Miss Westbury. ⁴²⁷Even if it seems to tell against him, go on. ⁴²⁸We cannot say what it may lead to.”

⁴²⁹“Indeed, I have nothing more to tell. ⁴³⁰Once or twice it seemed to me that he was on the point of telling me something. ⁴³¹He spoke one evening of the importance of the secret, and I have some recollection that he said that no doubt foreign spies would pay a great deal to have it.”

⁴³²My friend's face grew graver still.

⁴³³“Anything else?”

⁴³⁴“He said that we were slack about such matters—that it would be easy for a traitor to get the plans.”

⁴³⁵“Was it only recently that he made such remarks?”

⁴³⁶“Yes, quite recently.”

⁴³⁷“Now tell us of that last evening.”

⁴³⁸“We were to go to the theatre. ⁴³⁹The fog was so thick that a cab was useless. ⁴⁴⁰We walked, and our way took us close to the office. ⁴⁴¹Suddenly he darted away into the fog.”

⁴⁴²“Without a word?”

⁴⁴³“He gave an exclamation; that was all. ⁴⁴⁴I waited but he never returned. ⁴⁴⁵Then I walked home. ⁴⁴⁶Next morning, after the office opened, they came to inquire. ⁴⁴⁷About twelve o'clock we heard the terrible news. ⁴⁴⁸Oh, Mr. Holmes, if you could only, only save his honour! ⁴⁴⁹It was so much to him.”

⁴⁵⁰Holmes shook his head sadly.

⁴⁵¹“Come, Watson,” said he, “our ways lie elsewhere. ⁴⁵²Our next station must be the office from which the papers were taken.

⁴⁵³“It was black enough before against this young man, but our inquiries make it blacker,” he remarked as the cab lumbered off. ⁴⁵⁴“His coming marriage gives a motive for the crime. ⁴⁵⁵He naturally wanted money. ⁴⁵⁶The idea was in his head, since he spoke about it. ⁴⁵⁷He nearly made the girl an accomplice in the treason by telling her his plans. ⁴⁵⁸It is all very bad.”

⁴⁵⁹“But surely, Holmes, character goes for something? ⁴⁶⁰Then, again, why should he leave the girl in the street and dart away to commit a felony?”

⁴⁶¹“Exactly! ⁴⁶²There are certainly objections. ⁴⁶³But it is a formidable case which they have to meet.”

⁴⁶⁴Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk, met us at the office and received us with that respect which my companion's card always commanded. ⁴⁶⁵He was a thin, gruff, bespectacled man of middle age, his cheeks haggard, and his hands twitching from the nervous strain to which he had been subjected.

⁴⁶⁶“It is bad, Mr. Holmes, very bad! ⁴⁶⁷Have you heard of the death of the chief?”

⁴⁶⁸“We have just come from his house.”

⁴⁶⁹“The place is disorganized. ⁴⁷⁰The chief dead, Cadogan West dead, our papers stolen. ⁴⁷¹And yet, when we closed our door on Monday evening, we were as efficient an office as any in the government service. ⁴⁷²Good God, it's dreadful to think of! ⁴⁷³That West, of all men, should have done such a thing!”

⁴⁷⁴“You are sure of his guilt, then?”

⁴⁷⁵“I can see no other way out of it. ⁴⁷⁶And yet I would have trusted him as I trust myself.”

⁴⁷⁷“At what hour was the office closed on Monday?”

478“At five.”

479“Did you close it?”

480“I am always the last man out.”

481“Where were the plans?”

482“In that safe. ⁴⁸³I put them there myself.”

484“Is there no watchman to the building?”

485“There is, but he has other departments to look after as well. ⁴⁸⁶He is an old soldier and a most trustworthy man. ⁴⁸⁷He saw nothing that evening. ⁴⁸⁸Of course the fog was very thick.”

489“Suppose that Cadogan West wished to make his way into the building after hours; he would need three keys, would he not, before he could reach the papers?”

490“Yes, he would. ⁴⁹¹The key of the outer door, the key of the office, and the key of the safe.”

492“Only Sir James Walter and you had those keys?”

493“I had no keys of the doors—only of the safe.”

494“Was Sir James a man who was orderly in his habits?”

495“Yes, I think he was. ⁴⁹⁶I know that so far as those three keys are concerned he kept them on the same ring. ⁴⁹⁷I have often seen them there.”

498“And that ring went with him to London?”

499“He said so.”

500“And your key never left your possession?”

501“Never.”

502“Then West, if he is the culprit, must have had a duplicate. ⁵⁰³And yet none was found upon his body. ⁵⁰⁴One other point: if a clerk in this office desired to sell the plans, would it not be simply to copy the plans for himself than to take the originals, as was actually done?”

505“It would take considerable technical knowledge to copy the plans in an effective way.”

506“But I suppose either Sir James, or you, or West has that technical knowledge?”

507“No doubt we had, but I beg you won't try to drag me into the matter, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁰⁸What is the use of our speculating in this way when the original plans were actually found on West?”

509“Well, it is certainly singular that he should run the risk of taking originals if he could safely have taken copies, which would have equally served his turn.”

510“Singular, no doubt—and yet he did so.”

511“Every inquiry in this case reveals something inexplicable. ⁵¹²Now there are three papers still missing. ⁵¹³They are, as I understand, the vital ones.”

514“Yes, that is so.”

515“Do you mean to say that anyone holding these three papers, and without the seven others, could construct a Bruce-Partington submarine?”

⁵¹⁶“I reported to that effect to the Admiralty. ⁵¹⁷But to-day I have been over the drawings again, and I am not so sure of it. ⁵¹⁸The double valves with the automatic self-adjusting slots are drawn in one of the papers which have been returned. ⁵¹⁹Until the foreigners had invented that for themselves they could not make the boat. ⁵²⁰Of course they might soon get over the difficulty.”

⁵²¹“But the three missing drawings are the most important?”

⁵²²“Undoubtedly.”

⁵²³“I think, with your permission, I will now take a stroll round the premises. ⁵²⁴I do not recall any other question which I desired to ask.”

⁵²⁵He examined the lock of the safe, the door of the room, and finally the iron shutters of the window. ⁵²⁶It was only when we were on the lawn outside that his interest was strongly excited. ⁵²⁷There was a laurel bush outside the window, and several of the branches bore signs of having been twisted or snapped. ⁵²⁸He examined them carefully with his lens, and then some dim and vague marks upon the earth beneath. ⁵²⁹Finally he asked the chief clerk to close the iron shutters, and he pointed out to me that they hardly met in the centre, and that it would be possible for anyone outside to see what was going on within the room.

⁵³⁰“The indications are ruined by three days' delay. ⁵³¹They may mean something or nothing. ⁵³²Well, Watson, I do not think that Woolwich can help us further. ⁵³³It is a small crop which we have gathered. ⁵³⁴Let us see if we can do better in London.”

⁵³⁵Yet we added one more sheaf to our harvest before we left Woolwich Station. ⁵³⁶The clerk in the ticket office was able to say with confidence that he saw Cadogan West—whom he knew well by sight—upon the Monday night, and that he went to London by the 8.15 to London Bridge. ⁵³⁷He was alone and took a single third-class ticket. ⁵³⁸The clerk was struck at the time by his excited and nervous manner. ⁵³⁹So shaky was he that he could hardly pick up his change, and the clerk had helped him with it. ⁵⁴⁰A reference to the timetable showed that the 8.15 was the first train which it was possible for West to take after he had left the lady about 7.30.

⁵⁴¹“Let us reconstruct, Watson,” said Holmes after half an hour of silence. ⁵⁴²“I am not aware that in all our joint researches we have ever had a case which was more difficult to get at. ⁵⁴³Every fresh advance which we make only reveals a fresh ridge beyond. ⁵⁴⁴And yet we have surely made some appreciable progress.

⁵⁴⁵“The effect of our inquiries at Woolwich has in the main been against young Cadogan West; but the indications at the window would lend themselves to a more favourable hypothesis. ⁵⁴⁶Let us suppose, for example, that he had been approached by some foreign agent. ⁵⁴⁷It might have been done under such pledges as would have prevented him from speaking of it, and yet would have affected his thoughts in the direction indicated by his remarks to his fiancée. ⁵⁴⁸Very good. ⁵⁴⁹We will now suppose that as he went to the theatre with the young lady he suddenly, in the fog, caught a glimpse of this same agent going in the direction of the office. ⁵⁵⁰He was an impetuous man, quick in his decisions. ⁵⁵¹Everything gave way to his duty. ⁵⁵²He followed the man, reached the window, saw the abstraction of the documents, and pursued the thief. ⁵⁵³In this way we get over the objection that no one would take originals when he could make copies. ⁵⁵⁴This outsider had to take originals. ⁵⁵⁵So far it holds together.”

⁵⁵⁶“What is the next step?”

⁵⁵⁷“Then we come into difficulties. ⁵⁵⁸One would imagine that under such circumstances the first act of young Cadogan West would be to seize the villain and raise the alarm. ⁵⁵⁹Why did he not do so? ⁵⁶⁰Could it have been an official superior who took the papers? ⁵⁶¹That would explain West's conduct. ⁵⁶²Or could the chief have given West the slip in the fog, and West started at once to London to head him off from his own rooms, presuming that he knew where the rooms were? ⁵⁶³The call must have been very

pressing, since he left his girl standing in the fog and made no effort to communicate with her. ⁵⁶⁴Our scent runs cold here, and there is a vast gap between either hypothesis and the laying of West's body, with seven papers in his pocket, on the roof of a Metropolitan train. ⁵⁶⁵My instinct now is to work from the other end. ⁵⁶⁶If Mycroft has given us the list of addresses we may be able to pick our man and follow two tracks instead of one."

⁵⁶⁷Surely enough, a note awaited us at Baker Street. ⁵⁶⁸A government messenger had brought it post-haste. ⁵⁶⁹Holmes glanced at it and threw it over to me.

⁵⁷⁰There are numerous small fry, but few who would handle so big an affair. ⁵⁷¹The only men worth considering are Adolph Mayer, of 13 Great George Street, Westminster; Louis La Rothiere, of Campden Mansions, Notting Hill; and Hugo Oberstein, 13 Caulfield Gardens, Kensington. ⁵⁷²The latter was known to be in town on Monday and is now reported as having left. ⁵⁷³Glad to hear you have seen some light. ⁵⁷⁴The Cabinet awaits your final report with the utmost anxiety. ⁵⁷⁵Urgent representations have arrived from the very highest quarter. ⁵⁷⁶The whole force of the State is at your back if you should need it.

⁵⁷⁷— Mycroft.

⁵⁷⁸"I'm afraid," said Holmes, smiling, "that all the queen's horses and all the queen's men cannot avail in this matter." ⁵⁷⁹He had spread out his big map of London and leaned eagerly over it. ⁵⁸⁰"Well, well," said he presently with an exclamation of satisfaction, "things are turning a little in our direction at last. ⁵⁸¹Why, Watson, I do honestly believe that we are going to pull it off, after all." ⁵⁸²He slapped me on the shoulder with a sudden burst of hilarity. ⁵⁸³"I am going out now. It is only a reconnaissance. ⁵⁸⁴I will do nothing serious without my trusted comrade and biographer at my elbow. ⁵⁸⁵Do you stay here, and the odds are that you will see me again in an hour or two. ⁵⁸⁶If time hangs heavy get foolscap and a pen, and begin your narrative of how we saved the State."

⁵⁸⁷I felt some reflection of his elation in my own mind, for I knew well that he would not depart so far from his usual austerity of demeanour unless there was good cause for exultation. ⁵⁸⁸All the long November evening I waited, filled with impatience for his return. ⁵⁸⁹At last, shortly after nine o'clock, there arrived a messenger with a note:

⁵⁹⁰Am dining at Goldini's Restaurant, Gloucester Road, Kensington. ⁵⁹¹Please come at once and join me there. ⁵⁹²Bring with you a jemmy, a dark lantern, a chisel, and a revolver.

⁵⁹³— S.H.

⁵⁹⁴It was a nice equipment for a respectable citizen to carry through the dim, fog-draped streets. ⁵⁹⁵I stowed them all discreetly away in my overcoat and drove straight to the address given. ⁵⁹⁶There sat my friend at a little round table near the door of the garish Italian restaurant.

⁵⁹⁷"Have you had something to eat? ⁵⁹⁸Then join me in a coffee and curacao. ⁵⁹⁹Try one of the proprietor's cigars. ⁶⁰⁰They are less poisonous than one would expect. ⁶⁰¹Have you the tools?"

⁶⁰²"They are here, in my overcoat."

⁶⁰³"Excellent. ⁶⁰⁴Let me give you a short sketch of what I have done, with some indication of what we are about to do. ⁶⁰⁵Now it must be evident to you, Watson, that this young man's body was placed on the roof of the train. ⁶⁰⁶That was clear from the instant that I determined the fact that it was from the roof, and not from a carriage, that he had fallen."

⁶⁰⁷"Could it not have been dropped from a bridge?"

⁶⁰⁸“I should say it was impossible. ⁶⁰⁹If you examine the roofs you will find that they are slightly rounded, and there is no railing round them. ⁶¹⁰Therefore, we can say for certain that young Cadogan West was placed on it.”

⁶¹¹“How could he be placed there?”

⁶¹²“That was the question which we had to answer. ⁶¹³There is only one possible way. ⁶¹⁴You are aware that the Underground runs clear of tunnels at some points in the West End. ⁶¹⁵I had a vague memory that as I have travelled by it I have occasionally seen windows just above my head. ⁶¹⁶Now, suppose that a train halted under such a window, would there be any difficulty in laying a body upon the roof?”

⁶¹⁷“It seems most improbable.”

⁶¹⁸“We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. ⁶¹⁹Here all other contingencies have failed. ⁶²⁰When I found that the leading international agent, who had just left London, lived in a row of houses which abutted upon the Underground, I was so pleased that you were a little astonished at my sudden frivolity.”

⁶²¹“Oh, that was it, was it?”

⁶²²“Yes, that was it. ⁶²³Mr. Hugo Oberstein, of 13 Caulfield Gardens, had become my objective. ⁶²⁴I began my operations at Gloucester Road Station, where a very helpful official walked with me along the track and allowed me to satisfy myself not only that the back-stair windows of Caulfield Gardens open on the line but the even more essential fact that, owing to the intersection of one of the larger railways, the Underground trains are frequently held motionless for some minutes at that very spot.”

⁶²⁵“Splendid, Holmes! ⁶²⁶You have got it!”

⁶²⁷“So far—so far, Watson. ⁶²⁸We advance, but the goal is afar. ⁶²⁹Well, having seen the back of Caulfield Gardens, I visited the front and satisfied myself that the bird was indeed flown. ⁶³⁰It is a considerable house, unfurnished, so far as I could judge, in the upper rooms. ⁶³¹Oberstein lived there with a single valet, who was probably a confederate entirely in his confidence. ⁶³²We must bear in mind that Oberstein has gone to the Continent to dispose of his booty, but not with any idea of flight; for he had no reason to fear a warrant, and the idea of an amateur domiciliary visit would certainly never occur to him. ⁶³³Yet that is precisely what we are about to make.”

⁶³⁴“Could we not get a warrant and legalize it?”

⁶³⁵“Hardly on the evidence.”

⁶³⁶“What can we hope to do?”

⁶³⁷“We cannot tell what correspondence may be there.”

⁶³⁸“I don't like it, Holmes.”

⁶³⁹“My dear fellow, you shall keep watch in the street. ⁶⁴⁰I'll do the criminal part. ⁶⁴¹It's not a time to stick at trifles. ⁶⁴²Think of Mycroft's note, of the Admiralty, the Cabinet, the exalted person who waits for news. ⁶⁴³We are bound to go.”

⁶⁴⁴My answer was to rise from the table.

⁶⁴⁵“You are right, Holmes. ⁶⁴⁶We are bound to go.”

⁶⁴⁷He sprang up and shook me by the hand.

⁶⁴⁸“I knew you would not shrink at the last,” said he, and for a moment I saw something in his eyes which was nearer to tenderness than I had ever seen. ⁶⁴⁹The next instant he was his masterful, practical self once more.

⁶⁵⁰“It is nearly half a mile, but there is no hurry. ⁶⁵¹Let us walk,” said he. ⁶⁵²“Don't drop the instruments, I beg. ⁶⁵³Your arrest as a suspicious character would be a most unfortunate complication.”

⁶⁵⁴Caulfield Gardens was one of those lines of flat-faced pillared, and porticoed houses which are so prominent a product of the middle Victorian epoch in the West End of London. ⁶⁵⁵Next door there appeared to be a children's party, for the merry buzz of young voices and the clatter of a piano resounded through the night. ⁶⁵⁶The fog still hung about and screened us with its friendly shade. ⁶⁵⁷Holmes had lit his lantern and flashed it upon the massive door.

⁶⁵⁸“This is a serious proposition,” said he. ⁶⁵⁹“It is certainly bolted as well as locked. ⁶⁶⁰We would do better in the area. ⁶⁶¹There is an excellent archway down yonder in case a too zealous policeman should intrude. ⁶⁶²Give me a hand, Watson, and I'll do the same for you.”

⁶⁶³A minute later we were both in the area. ⁶⁶⁴Hardly had we reached the dark shadows before the step of the policeman was heard in the fog above. ⁶⁶⁵As its soft rhythm died away, Holmes set to work upon the lower door. ⁶⁶⁶I saw him stoop and strain until with a sharp crash it flew open. ⁶⁶⁷We sprang through into the dark passage, closing the area door behind us. ⁶⁶⁸Holmes let the way up the curving, uncarpeted stair. ⁶⁶⁹His little fan of yellow light shone upon a low window.

⁶⁷⁰“Here we are, Watson—this must be the one.” ⁶⁷¹He threw it open, and as he did so there was a low, harsh murmur, growing steadily into a loud roar as a train dashed past us in the darkness. ⁶⁷²Holmes swept his light along the window-sill. ⁶⁷³It was thickly coated with soot from the passing engines, but the black surface was blurred and rubbed in places.

⁶⁷⁴“You can see where they rested the body. ⁶⁷⁵Halloa, Watson! what is this? ⁶⁷⁶There can be no doubt that it is a blood mark.” ⁶⁷⁷He was pointing to faint discolourations along the woodwork of the window. ⁶⁷⁸“Here it is on the stone of the stair also. ⁶⁷⁹The demonstration is complete. ⁶⁸⁰Let us stay here until a train stops.”

⁶⁸¹We had not long to wait. ⁶⁸²The very next train roared from the tunnel as before, but slowed in the open, and then, with a creaking of brakes, pulled up immediately beneath us. ⁶⁸³It was not four feet from the window-ledge to the roof of the carriages. ⁶⁸⁴Holmes softly closed the window.

⁶⁸⁵“So far we are justified,” said he. ⁶⁸⁶“What do you think of it, Watson?”

⁶⁸⁷“A masterpiece. ⁶⁸⁸You have never risen to a greater height.”

⁶⁸⁹“I cannot agree with you there. ⁶⁹⁰From the moment that I conceived the idea of the body being upon the roof, which surely was not a very abstruse one, all the rest was inevitable. ⁶⁹¹If it were not for the grave interests involved the affair up to this point would be insignificant. ⁶⁹²Our difficulties are still before us. ⁶⁹³But perhaps we may find something here which may help us.”

⁶⁹⁴We had ascended the kitchen stair and entered the suite of rooms upon the first floor. ⁶⁹⁵One was a dining-room, severely furnished and containing nothing of interest. ⁶⁹⁶A second was a bedroom, which also drew blank. ⁶⁹⁷The remaining room appeared more promising, and my companion settled down to a systematic examination. ⁶⁹⁸It was littered with books and papers, and was evidently used as a study. ⁶⁹⁹Swiftly and methodically Holmes turned over the contents of drawer after drawer and cupboard after cupboard, but no gleam of success came to brighten his austere face. ⁷⁰⁰At the end of an hour he was no further than when he started.

⁷⁰¹“The cunning dog has covered his tracks,” said he. ⁷⁰²“He has left nothing to incriminate him. ⁷⁰³His dangerous correspondence has been destroyed or removed. ⁷⁰⁴This is our last chance.”

⁷⁰⁵It was a small tin cash-box which stood upon the writing-desk. ⁷⁰⁶Holmes pried it open with his chisel. ⁷⁰⁷Several rolls of paper were within, covered with figures and calculations, without any note to show to what they referred. ⁷⁰⁸The recurring words, “water pressure” and “pressure to the square inch” suggested some possible relation to a submarine. ⁷⁰⁹Holmes tossed them all impatiently aside. ⁷¹⁰There only remained an envelope with some small newspaper slips inside it. ⁷¹¹He shook them out on the table, and at once I saw by his eager face that his hopes had been raised.

⁷¹²“What's this, Watson? ⁷¹³Eh? ⁷¹⁴What's this? ⁷¹⁵Record of a series of messages in the advertisements of a paper. ⁷¹⁶Daily Telegraph agony column by the print and paper. ⁷¹⁷Right-hand top corner of a page. ⁷¹⁸No dates—but messages arrange themselves. ⁷¹⁹This must be the first:

⁷²⁰“Hoped to hear sooner. ⁷²¹Terms agreed to. ⁷²²Write fully to address given on card.

⁷²³— Pierrot.

⁷²⁴“Next comes:

⁷²⁵“Too complex for description. ⁷²⁶Must have full report. ⁷²⁷Stuff awaits you when goods delivered.

⁷²⁸— Pierrot.

⁷²⁹“Then comes:

⁷³⁰“Matter presses. ⁷³¹Must withdraw offer unless contract completed. ⁷³²Make appointment by letter. ⁷³³Will confirm by advertisement.

⁷³⁴— Pierrot.

⁷³⁵“Finally:

⁷³⁶“Monday night after nine. ⁷³⁷Two taps. ⁷³⁸Only ourselves. ⁷³⁹Do not be so suspicious. ⁷⁴⁰Payment in hard cash when goods delivered.

⁷⁴¹— Pierrot.

⁷⁴²“A fairly complete record, Watson! ⁷⁴³If we could only get at the man at the other end!” ⁷⁴⁴He sat lost in thought, tapping his fingers on the table. ⁷⁴⁵Finally he sprang to his feet.

⁷⁴⁶“Well, perhaps it won't be so difficult, after all. ⁷⁴⁷There is nothing more to be done here, Watson. ⁷⁴⁸I think we might drive round to the offices of the Daily Telegraph, and so bring a good day's work to a conclusion.”

⁷⁴⁹Mycroft Holmes and Lestrade had come round by appointment after breakfast next day and Sherlock Holmes had recounted to them our proceedings of the day before. ⁷⁵⁰The professional shook his head over our confessed burglary.

⁷⁵¹“We can't do these things in the force, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ⁷⁵²“No wonder you get results that are beyond us. ⁷⁵³But some of these days you'll go too far, and you'll find yourself and your friend in trouble.”

⁷⁵⁴“For England, home and beauty—eh, Watson? ⁷⁵⁵Martyrs on the altar of our country. ⁷⁵⁶But what do you think of it, Mycroft?”

⁷⁵⁷“Excellent, Sherlock! ⁷⁵⁸Admirable! ⁷⁵⁹But what use will you make of it?”

⁷⁶⁰Holmes picked up the Daily Telegraph which lay upon the table.

⁷⁶¹“Have you seen Pierrot's advertisement to-day?”

⁷⁶²“What? ⁷⁶³Another one?”

⁷⁶⁴“Yes, here it is:

⁷⁶⁵“To-night. ⁷⁶⁶Same hour. ⁷⁶⁷Same place. ⁷⁶⁸Two taps. ⁷⁶⁹Most vitally important. ⁷⁷⁰Your own safety at stake.

⁷⁷¹— Pierrot.

⁷⁷²“By George!” cried Lestrade. ⁷⁷³“If he answers that we've got him!”

⁷⁷⁴“That was my idea when I put it in. ⁷⁷⁵I think if you could both make it convenient to come with us about eight o'clock to Caulfield Gardens we might possibly get a little nearer to a solution.”

⁷⁷⁶One of the most remarkable characteristics of Sherlock Holmes was his power of throwing his brain out of action and switching all his thoughts on to lighter things whenever he had convinced himself that he could no longer work to advantage. ⁷⁷⁷I remember that during the whole of that memorable day he lost himself in a monograph which he had undertaken upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus. ⁷⁷⁸For my own part I had none of this power of detachment, and the day, in consequence, appeared to be interminable. ⁷⁷⁹The great national importance of the issue, the suspense in high quarters, the direct nature of the experiment which we were trying—all combined to work upon my nerve. ⁷⁸⁰It was a relief to me when at last, after a light dinner, we set out upon our expedition. ⁷⁸¹Lestrade and Mycroft met us by appointment at the outside of Gloucester Road Station. ⁷⁸²The area door of Oberstein's house had been left open the night before, and it was necessary for me, as Mycroft Holmes absolutely and indignantly declined to climb the railings, to pass in and open the hall door. ⁷⁸³By nine o'clock we were all seated in the study, waiting patiently for our man.

⁷⁸⁴An hour passed and yet another. ⁷⁸⁵When eleven struck, the measured beat of the great church clock seemed to sound the dirge of our hopes. ⁷⁸⁶Lestrade and Mycroft were fidgeting in their seats and looking twice a minute at their watches. ⁷⁸⁷Holmes sat silent and composed, his eyelids half shut, but every sense on the alert. ⁷⁸⁸He raised his head with a sudden jerk.

⁷⁸⁹“He is coming,” said he.

⁷⁹⁰There had been a furtive step past the door. ⁷⁹¹Now it returned. ⁷⁹²We heard a shuffling sound outside, and then two sharp taps with the knocker. ⁷⁹³Holmes rose, motioning us to remain seated. ⁷⁹⁴The gas in the hall was a mere point of light. ⁷⁹⁵He opened the outer door, and then as a dark figure slipped past him he closed and fastened it. ⁷⁹⁶“This way!” we heard him say, and a moment later our man stood before us. ⁷⁹⁷Holmes had followed him closely, and as the man turned with a cry of surprise and alarm he caught him by the collar and threw him back into the room. ⁷⁹⁸Before our prisoner had recovered his balance the door was shut and Holmes standing with his back against it. ⁷⁹⁹The man glared round him, staggered, and fell senseless upon the floor. ⁸⁰⁰With the shock, his broad-brimmed hat flew from his head, his cravat slipped sown from his lips, and there were the long light beard and the soft, handsome delicate features of Colonel Valentine Walter.

⁸⁰¹Holmes gave a whistle of surprise.

⁸⁰²“You can write me down an ass this time, Watson,” said he. ⁸⁰³“This was not the bird that I was looking for.”

⁸⁰⁴“Who is he?” asked Mycroft eagerly.

⁸⁰⁵“The younger brother of the late Sir James Walter, the head of the Submarine Department. ⁸⁰⁶Yes, yes; I see the fall of the cards. ⁸⁰⁷He is coming to. ⁸⁰⁸I think that you had best leave his examination to me.”

⁸⁰⁹We had carried the prostrate body to the sofa. ⁸¹⁰Now our prisoner sat up, looked round him with a horror-stricken face, and passed his hand over his forehead, like one who cannot believe his own senses.

⁸¹¹"What is this?" he asked. ⁸¹²"I came here to visit Mr. Oberstein."

⁸¹³"Everything is known, Colonel Walter," said Holmes. ⁸¹⁴"How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension. ⁸¹⁵But your whole correspondence and relations with Oberstein are within our knowledge. ⁸¹⁶So also are the circumstances connected with the death of young Cadogan West. ⁸¹⁷Let me advise you to gain at least the small credit for repentance and confession, since there are still some details which we can only learn from your lips."

⁸¹⁸The man groaned and sank his face in his hands. ⁸¹⁹We waited, but he was silent.

⁸²⁰"I can assure you," said Holmes, "that every essential is already known. ⁸²¹We know that you were pressed for money; that you took an impress of the keys which your brother held; and that you entered into a correspondence with Oberstein, who answered your letters through the advertisement columns of the Daily Telegraph. ⁸²²We are aware that you went down to the office in the fog on Monday night, but that you were seen and followed by young Cadogan West, who had probably some previous reason to suspect you. ⁸²³He saw your theft, but could not give the alarm, as it was just possible that you were taking the papers to your brother in London. ⁸²⁴Leaving all his private concerns, like the good citizen that he was, he followed you closely in the fog and kept at your heels until you reached this very house. ⁸²⁵There he intervened, and then it was, Colonel Walter, that to treason you added the more terrible crime of murder."

⁸²⁶"I did not! ⁸²⁷I did not! ⁸²⁸Before God I swear that I did not!" cried our wretched prisoner.

⁸²⁹"Tell us, then, how Cadogan West met his end before you laid him upon the roof of a railway carriage."

⁸³⁰"I will. ⁸³¹I swear to you that I will. ⁸³²I did the rest. ⁸³³I confess it. ⁸³⁴It was just as you say. ⁸³⁵A Stock Exchange debt had to be paid. ⁸³⁶I needed the money badly. ⁸³⁷Oberstein offered me five thousand. ⁸³⁸It was to save myself from ruin. ⁸³⁹But as to murder, I am as innocent as you."

⁸⁴⁰"What happened, then?"

⁸⁴¹"He had his suspicions before, and he followed me as you describe. ⁸⁴²I never knew it until I was at the very door. ⁸⁴³It was thick fog, and one could not see three yards. ⁸⁴⁴I had given two taps and Oberstein had come to the door. ⁸⁴⁵The young man rushed up and demanded to know what we were about to do with the papers. ⁸⁴⁶Oberstein had a short life-preserver. ⁸⁴⁷He always carried it with him. ⁸⁴⁸As West forced his way after us into the house Oberstein struck him on the head. ⁸⁴⁹The blow was a fatal one. ⁸⁵⁰He was dead within five minutes. ⁸⁵¹There he lay in the hall, and we were at our wit's end what to do. ⁸⁵²Then Oberstein had this idea about the trains which halted under his back window. ⁸⁵³But first he examined the papers which I had brought. ⁸⁵⁴He said that three of them were essential, and that he must keep them. ⁸⁵⁵'You cannot keep them,' said I. ⁸⁵⁶'There will be a dreadful row at Woolwich if they are not returned.' ⁸⁵⁷'I must keep them,' said he, 'for they are so technical that it is impossible in the time to make copies.' ⁸⁵⁸'Then they must all go back together to-night,' said I. ⁸⁵⁹He thought for a little, and then he cried out that he had it. ⁸⁶⁰'Three I will keep,' said he. ⁸⁶¹'The others we will stuff into the pocket of this young man. ⁸⁶²When he is found the whole business will assuredly be put to his account.' ⁸⁶³I could see no other way out of it, so we did as he suggested. ⁸⁶⁴We waited half an hour at the window before a train stopped. ⁸⁶⁵It was so thick that nothing could be seen, and we had no difficulty in lowering West's body on to the train. ⁸⁶⁶That was the end of the matter so far as I was concerned."

⁸⁶⁷"And your brother?"

⁸⁶⁸“He said nothing, but he had caught me once with his keys, and I think that he suspected. ⁸⁶⁹I read in his eyes that he suspected. ⁸⁷⁰As you know, he never held up his head again.”

⁸⁷¹There was silence in the room. ⁸⁷²It was broken by Mycroft Holmes.

⁸⁷³“Can you not make reparation? ⁸⁷⁴It would ease your conscience, and possibly your punishment.”

⁸⁷⁵“What reparation can I make?”

⁸⁷⁶“Where is Oberstein with the papers?”

⁸⁷⁷“I do not know.”

⁸⁷⁸“Did he give you no address?”

⁸⁷⁹“He said that letters to the Hôtel du Louvre, Paris, would eventually reach him.”

⁸⁸⁰“Then reparation is still within your power,” said Sherlock Holmes.

⁸⁸¹“I will do anything I can. ⁸⁸²I owe this fellow no particular good-will. ⁸⁸³He has been my ruin and my downfall.”

⁸⁸⁴“Here are paper and pen. ⁸⁸⁵Sit at this desk and write to my dictation. ⁸⁸⁶Direct the envelope to the address given. ⁸⁸⁷That is right. ⁸⁸⁸Now the letter:

⁸⁸⁹“Dear Sir:

⁸⁹⁰“With regard to our transaction, you will no doubt have observed by now that one essential detail is missing. ⁸⁹¹I have a tracing which will make it complete. ⁸⁹²This has involved me in extra trouble, however, and I must ask you for a further advance of five hundred pounds. ⁸⁹³I will not trust it to the post, nor will I take anything but gold or notes. ⁸⁹⁴I would come to you abroad, but it would excite remark if I left the country at present. ⁸⁹⁵Therefore I shall expect to meet you in the smoking-room of the Charing Cross Hotel at noon on Saturday. ⁸⁹⁶Remember that only English notes, or gold, will be taken.

⁸⁹⁷“That will do very well. ⁸⁹⁸I shall be very much surprised if it does not fetch our man.”

⁸⁹⁹And it did! ⁹⁰⁰It is a matter of history—that secret history of a nation which is often so much more intimate and interesting than its public chronicles—that Oberstein, eager to complete the coup of his lifetime, came to the lure and was safely engulfed for fifteen years in a British prison. ⁹⁰¹In his trunk were found the invaluable Bruce-Partington plans, which he had put up for auction in all the naval centres of Europe.

⁹⁰²Colonel Walter died in prison towards the end of the second year of his sentence. ⁹⁰³As to Holmes, he returned refreshed to his monograph upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus, which has since been printed for private circulation, and is said by experts to be the last word upon the subject. ⁹⁰⁴Some weeks afterwards I learned incidentally that my friend spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably fine emerald tie-pin. ⁹⁰⁵When I asked him if he had bought it, he answered that it was a present from a certain gracious lady in whose interests he had once been fortunate enough to carry out a small commission. ⁹⁰⁶He said no more; but I fancy that I could guess at that lady's august name, and I have little doubt that the emerald pin will forever recall to my friend's memory the adventure of the Bruce-Partington plans.

The Adventure of the Dying Detective

¹Mrs. Hudson, the landlady of Sherlock Holmes, was a long-suffering woman. ²Not only was her first-floor flat invaded at all hours by throngs of singular and often undesirable characters but her remarkable lodger showed an eccentricity and irregularity in his life which must have sorely tried her patience. ³His incredible untidiness, his addiction to music at strange hours, his occasional revolver practice within doors, his weird and often malodorous scientific experiments, and the atmosphere of violence and danger which hung around him made him the very worst tenant in London. ⁴On the other hand, his payments were princely. ⁵I have no doubt that the house might have been purchased at the price which Holmes paid for his rooms during the years that I was with him.

⁶The landlady stood in the deepest awe of him and never dared to interfere with him, however outrageous his proceedings might seem. ⁷She was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women. ⁸He disliked and distrusted the sex, but he was always a chivalrous opponent. ⁹Knowing how genuine was her regard for him, I listened earnestly to her story when she came to my rooms in the second year of my married life and told me of the sad condition to which my poor friend was reduced.

¹⁰"He's dying, Dr. Watson," said she. ¹¹"For three days he has been sinking, and I doubt if he will last the day. ¹²He would not let me get a doctor. ¹³This morning when I saw his bones sticking out of his face and his great bright eyes looking at me I could stand no more of it. ¹⁴"With your leave or without it, Mr. Holmes, I am going for a doctor this very hour," said I. ¹⁵"Let it be Watson, then," said he. ¹⁶"I wouldn't waste an hour in coming to him, sir, or you may not see him alive."

¹⁷I was horrified for I had heard nothing of his illness. ¹⁸I need not say that I rushed for my coat and my hat. ¹⁹As we drove back I asked for the details.

²⁰"There is little I can tell you, sir. ²¹He has been working at a case down at Rotherhithe, in an alley near the river, and he has brought this illness back with him. ²²He took to his bed on Wednesday afternoon and has never moved since. ²³For these three days neither food nor drink has passed his lips."

²⁴"Good God! ²⁵Why did you not call in a doctor?"

²⁶"He wouldn't have it, sir. ²⁷You know how masterful he is. ²⁸I didn't dare to disobey him. ²⁹But he's not long for this world, as you'll see for yourself the moment that you set eyes on him."

³⁰He was indeed a deplorable spectacle. ³¹In the dim light of a foggy November day the sick room was a gloomy spot, but it was that gaunt, wasted face staring at me from the bed which sent a chill to my heart. ³²His eyes had the brightness of fever, there was a hectic flush upon either cheek, and dark crusts clung to his lips; the thin hands upon the coverlet twitched incessantly, his voice was croaking and spasmodic. ³³He lay listlessly as I entered the room, but the sight of me brought a gleam of recognition to his eyes.

³⁴"Well, Watson, we seem to have fallen upon evil days," said he in a feeble voice, but with something of his old carelessness of manner.

³⁵"My dear fellow!" I cried, approaching him.

³⁶"Stand back! ³⁷Stand right back!" said he with the sharp imperiousness which I had associated only with moments of crisis. ³⁸"If you approach me, Watson, I shall order you out of the house."

³⁹"But why?"

⁴⁰"Because it is my desire. ⁴¹Is that not enough?"

⁴²Yes, Mrs. Hudson was right. ⁴³He was more masterful than ever. ⁴⁴It was pitiful, however, to see his exhaustion.

⁴⁵“I only wished to help,” I explained.

⁴⁶“Exactly! ⁴⁷You will help best by doing what you are told.”

⁴⁸“Certainly, Holmes.”

⁴⁹He relaxed the austerity of his manner.

⁵⁰“You are not angry?” he asked, gasping for breath.

⁵¹Poor devil, how could I be angry when I saw him lying in such a plight before me?

⁵²“It's for your own sake, Watson,” he croaked.

⁵³“For my sake?”

⁵⁴“I know what is the matter with me. ⁵⁵It is a coolie disease from Sumatra—a thing that the Dutch know more about than we, though they have made little of it up to date. ⁵⁶One thing only is certain. ⁵⁷It is infallibly deadly, and it is horribly contagious.”

⁵⁸He spoke now with a feverish energy, the long hands twitching and jerking as he motioned me away.

⁵⁹“Contagious by touch, Watson—that's it, by touch. ⁶⁰Keep your distance and all is well.”

⁶¹“Good heavens, Holmes! ⁶²Do you suppose that such a consideration weighs with me of an instant?

⁶³It would not affect me in the case of a stranger. ⁶⁴Do you imagine it would prevent me from doing my duty to so old a friend?”

⁶⁵Again I advanced, but he repulsed me with a look of furious anger.

⁶⁶“If you will stand there I will talk. ⁶⁷If you do not you must leave the room.”

⁶⁸I have so deep a respect for the extraordinary qualities of Holmes that I have always deferred to his wishes, even when I least understood them. ⁶⁹But now all my professional instincts were aroused. ⁷⁰Let him be my master elsewhere, I at least was his in a sick room.

⁷¹“Holmes,” said I, “you are not yourself. ⁷²A sick man is but a child, and so I will treat you. ⁷³Whether you like it or not, I will examine your symptoms and treat you for them.”

⁷⁴He looked at me with venomous eyes.

⁷⁵“If I am to have a doctor whether I will or not, let me at least have someone in whom I have confidence,” said he.

⁷⁶“Then you have none in me?”

⁷⁷“In your friendship, certainly. ⁷⁸But facts are facts, Watson, and, after all, you are only a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications. ⁷⁹It is painful to have to say these things, but you leave me no choice.”

⁸⁰I was bitterly hurt.

⁸¹“Such a remark is unworthy of you, Holmes. ⁸²It shows me very clearly the state of your own nerves.

⁸³But if you have no confidence in me I would not intrude my services. ⁸⁴Let me bring Sir Jasper Meek or Penrose Fisher, or any of the best men in London. ⁸⁵But someone you must have, and that is final.

⁸⁶If you think that I am going to stand here and see you die without either helping you myself or bringing anyone else to help you, then you have mistaken your man.”

⁸⁷“You mean well, Watson,” said the sick man with something between a sob and a groan. ⁸⁸“Shall I demonstrate your own ignorance? ⁸⁹What do you know, pray, of Tapanuli fever? ⁹⁰What do you know of the black Formosa corruption?”

⁹¹“I have never heard of either.”

⁹²“There are many problems of disease, many strange pathological possibilities, in the East, Watson.”

⁹³He paused after each sentence to collect his failing strength. ⁹⁴“I have learned so much during some recent researches which have a medico-criminal aspect. ⁹⁵It was in the course of them that I contracted this complaint. ⁹⁶You can do nothing.”

⁹⁷“Possibly not. ⁹⁸But I happen to know that Dr. Ainstree, the greatest living authority upon tropical disease, is now in London. ⁹⁹All remonstrance is useless, Holmes, I am going this instant to fetch him.”

¹⁰⁰I turned resolutely to the door.

¹⁰¹Never have I had such a shock! ¹⁰²In an instant, with a tiger-spring, the dying man had intercepted me. ¹⁰³I heard the sharp snap of a twisted key. ¹⁰⁴The next moment he had staggered back to his bed, exhausted and panting after his one tremendous outflame of energy.

¹⁰⁵“You won't take the key from me by force, Watson, I've got you, my friend. ¹⁰⁶Here you are, and here you will stay until I will otherwise. ¹⁰⁷But I'll humour you.” ¹⁰⁸(All this in little gasps, with terrible struggles for breath between.) ¹⁰⁹“You've only my own good at heart. ¹¹⁰Of course I know that very well. ¹¹¹You shall have your way, but give me time to get my strength. ¹¹²Not now, Watson, not now. ¹¹³It's four o'clock. ¹¹⁴At six you can go.”

¹¹⁵“This is insanity, Holmes.”

¹¹⁶“Only two hours, Watson. ¹¹⁷I promise you will go at six. ¹¹⁸Are you content to wait?”

¹¹⁹“I seem to have no choice.”

¹²⁰“None in the world, Watson. ¹²¹Thank you, I need no help in arranging the clothes. ¹²²You will please keep your distance. ¹²³Now, Watson, there is one other condition that I would make. ¹²⁴You will seek help, not from the man you mention, but from the one that I choose.”

¹²⁵“By all means.”

¹²⁶“The first three sensible words that you have uttered since you entered this room, Watson. ¹²⁷You will find some books over there. ¹²⁸I am somewhat exhausted; I wonder how a battery feels when it pours electricity into a non-conductor? ¹²⁹At six, Watson, we resume our conversation.”

¹³⁰But it was destined to be resumed long before that hour, and in circumstances which gave me a shock hardly second to that caused by his spring to the door. ¹³¹I had stood for some minutes looking at the silent figure in the bed. ¹³²His face was almost covered by the clothes and he appeared to be asleep. ¹³³Then, unable to settle down to reading, I walked slowly round the room, examining the pictures of celebrated criminals with which every wall was adorned. ¹³⁴Finally, in my aimless perambulation, I came to the mantelpiece. ¹³⁵A litter of pipes, tobacco-pouches, syringes, penknives, revolver-cartridges, and other debris was scattered over it. ¹³⁶In the midst of these was a small black and white ivory box with a sliding lid. ¹³⁷It was a neat little thing, and I had stretched out my hand to examine it more closely when—

¹³⁸It was a dreadful cry that he gave—a yell which might have been heard down the street. ¹³⁹My skin went cold and my hair bristled at that horrible scream. ¹⁴⁰As I turned I caught a glimpse of a convulsed face and frantic eyes. ¹⁴¹I stood paralyzed, with the little box in my hand.

¹⁴²“Put it down! ¹⁴³Down, this instant, Watson—this instant, I say!” ¹⁴⁴His head sank back upon the pillow and he gave a deep sigh of relief as I replaced the box upon the mantelpiece. ¹⁴⁵“I hate to have my things touched, Watson. ¹⁴⁶You know that I hate it. ¹⁴⁷You fidget me beyond endurance. ¹⁴⁸You, a doctor—you are enough to drive a patient into an asylum. ¹⁴⁹Sit down, man, and let me have my rest!”

¹⁵⁰The incident left a most unpleasant impression upon my mind. ¹⁵¹The violent and causeless excitement, followed by this brutality of speech, so far removed from his usual suavity, showed me how deep was the disorganization of his mind. ¹⁵²Of all ruins, that of a noble mind is the most deplorable. ¹⁵³I sat in silent dejection until the stipulated time had passed. ¹⁵⁴He seemed to have been watching the clock as well as I, for it was hardly six before he began to talk with the same feverish animation as before.

¹⁵⁵“Now, Watson,” said he. ¹⁵⁶“Have you any change in your pocket?”

¹⁵⁷“Yes.”

¹⁵⁸“Any silver?”

¹⁵⁹“A good deal.”

¹⁶⁰“How many half-crowns?”

¹⁶¹“I have five.”

¹⁶²“Ah, too few! ¹⁶³Too few! ¹⁶⁴How very unfortunate, Watson! ¹⁶⁵However, such as they are you can put them in your watchpocket. ¹⁶⁶And all the rest of your money in your left trouser pocket. ¹⁶⁷Thank you. ¹⁶⁸It will balance you so much better like that.”

¹⁶⁹This was raving insanity. ¹⁷⁰He shuddered, and again made a sound between a cough and a sob.

¹⁷¹“You will now light the gas, Watson, but you will be very careful that not for one instant shall it be more than half on. ¹⁷²I implore you to be careful, Watson. ¹⁷³Thank you, that is excellent. ¹⁷⁴No, you need not draw the blind. ¹⁷⁵Now you will have the kindness to place some letters and papers upon this table within my reach. ¹⁷⁶Thank you. ¹⁷⁷Now some of that litter from the mantelpiece. ¹⁷⁸Excellent, Watson! ¹⁷⁹There is a sugar-tongs there. ¹⁸⁰Kindly raise that small ivory box with its assistance. ¹⁸¹Place it here among the papers. ¹⁸²Good! ¹⁸³You can now go and fetch Mr. Culverton Smith, of 13 Lower Burke Street.”

¹⁸⁴To tell the truth, my desire to fetch a doctor had somewhat weakened, for poor Holmes was so obviously delirious that it seemed dangerous to leave him. ¹⁸⁵However, he was as eager now to consult the person named as he had been obstinate in refusing.

¹⁸⁶“I never heard the name,” said I.

¹⁸⁷“Possibly not, my good Watson. ¹⁸⁸It may surprise you to know that the man upon earth who is best versed in this disease is not a medical man, but a planter. ¹⁸⁹Mr. Culverton Smith is a well-known resident of Sumatra, now visiting London. ¹⁹⁰An outbreak of the disease upon his plantation, which was distant from medical aid, caused him to study it himself, with some rather far-reaching consequences. ¹⁹¹He is a very methodical person, and I did not desire you to start before six, because I was well aware that you would not find him in his study. ¹⁹²If you could persuade him to come here and give us the benefit of his unique experience of this disease, the investigation of which has been his dearest hobby, I cannot doubt that he could help me.”

¹⁹³I gave Holmes's remarks as a consecutive whole and will not attempt to indicate how they were interrupted by gaspings for breath and those clutchings of his hands which indicated the pain from which he was suffering. ¹⁹⁴His appearance had changed for the worse during the few hours that I had

been with him. ¹⁹⁵Those hectic spots were more pronounced, the eyes shone more brightly out of darker hollows, and a cold sweat glimmered upon his brow. ¹⁹⁶He still retained, however, the jaunty gallantry of his speech. ¹⁹⁷To the last gasp he would always be the master.

¹⁹⁸“You will tell him exactly how you have left me,” said he. ¹⁹⁹“You will convey the very impression which is in your own mind—a dying man—a dying and delirious man. ²⁰⁰Indeed, I cannot think why the whole bed of the ocean is not one solid mass of oysters, so prolific the creatures seem. ²⁰¹Ah, I am wondering! ²⁰²Strange how the brain controls the brain! ²⁰³What was I saying, Watson?”

²⁰⁴“My directions for Mr. Culverton Smith.”

²⁰⁵“Ah, yes, I remember. ²⁰⁶My life depends upon it. ²⁰⁷Plead with him, Watson. ²⁰⁸There is no good feeling between us. ²⁰⁹His nephew, Watson—I had suspicions of foul play and I allowed him to see it. ²¹⁰The boy died horribly. ²¹¹He has a grudge against me. ²¹²You will soften him, Watson. ²¹³Beg him, pray him, get him here by any means. ²¹⁴He can save me—only he!”

²¹⁵“I will bring him in a cab, if I have to carry him down to it.”

²¹⁶“You will do nothing of the sort. ²¹⁷You will persuade him to come. ²¹⁸And then you will return in front of him. ²¹⁹Make any excuse so as not to come with him. ²²⁰Don't forget, Watson. ²²¹You won't fail me. ²²²You never did fail me. ²²³No doubt there are natural enemies which limit the increase of the creatures. ²²⁴You and I, Watson, we have done our part. ²²⁵Shall the world, then, be overrun by oysters? ²²⁶No, no; horrible! ²²⁷You'll convey all that is in your mind.”

²²⁸I left him full of the image of this magnificent intellect babbling like a foolish child. ²²⁹He had handed me the key, and with a happy thought I took it with me lest he should lock himself in. ²³⁰Mrs. Hudson was waiting, trembling and weeping, in the passage. ²³¹Behind me as I passed from the flat I heard Holmes's high, thin voice in some delirious chant. ²³²Below, as I stood whistling for a cab, a man came on me through the fog.

²³³“How is Mr. Holmes, sir?” he asked.

²³⁴It was an old acquaintance, Inspector Morton, of Scotland Yard, dressed in unofficial tweeds.

²³⁵“He is very ill,” I answered.

²³⁶He looked at me in a most singular fashion. ²³⁷Had it not been too fiendish, I could have imagined that the gleam of the fanlight showed exultation in his face.

²³⁸“I heard some rumour of it,” said he.

²³⁹The cab had driven up, and I left him.

²⁴⁰Lower Burke Street proved to be a line of fine houses lying in the vague borderland between Notting Hill and Kensington. ²⁴¹The particular one at which my cabman pulled up had an air of smug and demure respectability in its old-fashioned iron railings, its massive folding-door, and its shining brasswork. ²⁴²All was in keeping with a solemn butler who appeared framed in the pink radiance of a tinted electrical light behind him.

²⁴³“Yes, Mr. Culverton Smith is in. ²⁴⁴Dr. Watson! ²⁴⁵Very good, sir, I will take up your card.”

²⁴⁶My humble name and title did not appear to impress Mr. Culverton Smith. ²⁴⁷Through the half-open door I heard a high, petulant, penetrating voice.

²⁴⁸“Who is this person? ²⁴⁹What does he want? ²⁵⁰Dear me, Staples, how often have I said that I am not to be disturbed in my hours of study?”

²⁵¹There came a gentle flow of soothing explanation from the butler.

²⁵²“Well, I won't see him, Staples. ²⁵³I can't have my work interrupted like this. ²⁵⁴I am not at home. ²⁵⁵Say so. ²⁵⁶Tell him to come in the morning if he really must see me.”

²⁵⁷Again the gentle murmur.

²⁵⁸“Well, well, give him that message. ²⁵⁹He can come in the morning, or he can stay away. ²⁶⁰My work must not be hindered.”

²⁶¹I thought of Holmes tossing upon his bed of sickness and counting the minutes, perhaps, until I could bring help to him. ²⁶²It was not a time to stand upon ceremony. ²⁶³His life depended upon my promptness. ²⁶⁴Before the apologetic butler had delivered his message I had pushed past him and was in the room.

²⁶⁵With a shrill cry of anger a man rose from a reclining chair beside the fire. ²⁶⁶I saw a great yellow face, coarse-grained and greasy, with heavy, double-chin, and two sullen, menacing gray eyes which glared at me from under tufted and sandy brows. ²⁶⁷A high bald head had a small velvet smoking-cap poised coquettishly upon one side of its pink curve. ²⁶⁸The skull was of enormous capacity, and yet as I looked down I saw to my amazement that the figure of the man was small and frail, twisted in the shoulders and back like one who has suffered from rickets in his childhood.

²⁶⁹“What's this?” he cried in a high, screaming voice. ²⁷⁰“What is the meaning of this intrusion? ²⁷¹Didn't I send you word that I would see you to-morrow morning?”

²⁷²“I am sorry,” said I, “but the matter cannot be delayed. ²⁷³Mr. Sherlock Holmes—”

²⁷⁴The mention of my friend's name had an extraordinary effect upon the little man. ²⁷⁵The look of anger passed in an instant from his face. ²⁷⁶His features became tense and alert.

²⁷⁷“Have you come from Holmes?” he asked.

²⁷⁸“I have just left him.”

²⁷⁹“What about Holmes? ²⁸⁰How is he?”

²⁸¹“He is desperately ill. ²⁸²That is why I have come.”

²⁸³The man motioned me to a chair, and turned to resume his own. ²⁸⁴As he did so I caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror over the mantelpiece. ²⁸⁵I could have sworn that it was set in a malicious and abominable smile. ²⁸⁶Yet I persuaded myself that it must have been some nervous contraction which I had surprised, for he turned to me an instant later with genuine concern upon his features.

²⁸⁷“I am sorry to hear this,” said he. ²⁸⁸“I only know Mr. Holmes through some business dealings which we have had, but I have every respect for his talents and his character. ²⁸⁹He is an amateur of crime, as I am of disease. ²⁹⁰For him the villain, for me the microbe. ²⁹¹There are my prisons,” he continued, pointing to a row of bottles and jars which stood upon a side table. ²⁹²“Among those gelatine cultivations some of the very worst offenders in the world are now doing time.”

²⁹³“It was on account of your special knowledge that Mr. Holmes desired to see you. ²⁹⁴He has a high opinion of you and thought that you were the one man in London who could help him.”

²⁹⁵The little man started, and the jaunty smoking-cap slid to the floor.

²⁹⁶“Why?” he asked. ²⁹⁷“Why should Mr. Homes think that I could help him in his trouble?”

²⁹⁸“Because of your knowledge of Eastern diseases.”

²⁹⁹“But why should he think that this disease which he has contracted is Eastern?”

³⁰⁰“Because, in some professional inquiry, he has been working among Chinese sailors down in the docks.”

³⁰¹Mr. Culverton Smith smiled pleasantly and picked up his smoking-cap.

³⁰²“Oh, that's it—is it?” said he. ³⁰³“I trust the matter is not so grave as you suppose. ³⁰⁴How long has he been ill?”

³⁰⁵“About three days.”

³⁰⁶“Is he delirious?”

³⁰⁷“Occasionally.”

³⁰⁸“Tut, tut! ³⁰⁹This sounds serious. ³¹⁰It would be inhuman not to answer his call. ³¹¹I very much resent any interruption to my work, Dr. Watson, but this case is certainly exceptional. ³¹²I will come with you at once.”

³¹³I remembered Holmes's injunction.

³¹⁴“I have another appointment,” said I.

³¹⁵“Very good. ³¹⁶I will go alone. ³¹⁷I have a note of Mr. Holmes's address. ³¹⁸You can rely upon my being there within half an hour at most.”

³¹⁹It was with a sinking heart that I reentered Holmes's bedroom. ³²⁰For all that I knew the worst might have happened in my absence. ³²¹To my enormous relief, he had improved greatly in the interval. ³²²His appearance was as ghastly as ever, but all trace of delirium had left him and he spoke in a feeble voice, it is true, but with even more than his usual crispness and lucidity.

³²³“Well, did you see him, Watson?”

³²⁴“Yes; he is coming.”

³²⁵“Admirable, Watson! ³²⁶Admirable! ³²⁷You are the best of messengers.”

³²⁸“He wished to return with me.”

³²⁹“That would never do, Watson. ³³⁰That would be obviously impossible. ³³¹Did he ask what ailed me?”

³³²“I told him about the Chinese in the East End.”

³³³“Exactly! ³³⁴Well, Watson, you have done all that a good friend could. ³³⁵You can now disappear from the scene.”

³³⁶“I must wait and hear his opinion, Holmes.”

³³⁷“Of course you must. ³³⁸But I have reasons to suppose that this opinion would be very much more frank and valuable if he imagines that we are alone. ³³⁹There is just room behind the head of my bed, Watson.”

³⁴⁰“My dear Holmes!”

³⁴¹“I fear there is no alternative, Watson. ³⁴²The room does not lend itself to concealment, which is as well, as it is the less likely to arouse suspicion. ³⁴³But just there, Watson, I fancy that it could be done.”

³⁴⁴Suddenly he sat up with a rigid intentness upon his haggard face. ³⁴⁵“There are the wheels, Watson.

³⁴⁶Quick, man, if you love me! ³⁴⁷And don't budge, whatever happens—whatever happens, do you hear?

³⁴⁸Don't speak! ³⁴⁹Don't move! ³⁵⁰Just listen with all your ears.” ³⁵¹Then in an instant his sudden access

of strength departed, and his masterful, purposeful talk droned away into the low, vague murmurings of a semi-delirious man.

³⁵²From the hiding-place into which I had been so swiftly hustled I heard the footfalls upon the stair, with the opening and the closing of the bedroom door. ³⁵³Then, to my surprise, there came a long silence, broken only by the heavy breathings and gaspings of the sick man. ³⁵⁴I could imagine that our visitor was standing by the bedside and looking down at the sufferer. ³⁵⁵At last that strange hush was broken.

³⁵⁶"Holmes!" he cried. ³⁵⁷"Holmes!" in the insistent tone of one who awakens a sleeper. ³⁵⁸"Can't you hear me, Holmes?" ³⁵⁹There was a rustling, as if he had shaken the sick man roughly by the shoulder.

³⁶⁰"Is that you, Mr. Smith?" Holmes whispered. ³⁶¹"I hardly dared hope that you would come."

³⁶²The other laughed.

³⁶³"I should imagine not," he said. ³⁶⁴"And yet, you see, I am here. ³⁶⁵Coals of fire, Holmes—coals of fire!"

³⁶⁶"It is very good of you—very noble of you. ³⁶⁷I appreciate your special knowledge."

³⁶⁸Our visitor sniggered.

³⁶⁹"You do. ³⁷⁰You are, fortunately, the only man in London who does. ³⁷¹Do you know what is the matter with you?"

³⁷²"The same," said Holmes.

³⁷³"Ah! ³⁷⁴You recognize the symptoms?"

³⁷⁵"Only too well."

³⁷⁶"Well, I shouldn't be surprised, Holmes. ³⁷⁷I shouldn't be surprised if it were the same. ³⁷⁸A bad lookout for you if it is. ³⁷⁹Poor Victor was a dead man on the fourth day—a strong, hearty young fellow. ³⁸⁰It was certainly, as you said, very surprising that he should have contracted and out-of-the-way Asiatic disease in the heart of London—a disease, too, of which I had made such a very special study. ³⁸¹Singular coincidence, Holmes. ³⁸²Very smart of you to notice it, but rather uncharitable to suggest that it was cause and effect."

³⁸³"I knew that you did it."

³⁸⁴"Oh, you did, did you? ³⁸⁵Well, you couldn't prove it, anyhow. ³⁸⁶But what do you think of yourself spreading reports about me like that, and then crawling to me for help the moment you are in trouble? ³⁸⁷What sort of a game is that—eh?"

³⁸⁸I heard the rasping, laboured breathing of the sick man. ³⁸⁹"Give me the water!" he gasped.

³⁹⁰"You're precious near your end, my friend, but I don't want you to go till I have had a word with you. ³⁹¹That's why I give you water. ³⁹²There, don't slop it about! ³⁹³That's right. ³⁹⁴Can you understand what I say?"

³⁹⁵Holmes groaned.

³⁹⁶"Do what you can for me. ³⁹⁷Let bygones be bygones," he whispered. ³⁹⁸"I'll put the words out of my head—I swear I will. ³⁹⁹Only cure me, and I'll forget it."

⁴⁰⁰"Forget what?"

⁴⁰¹"Well, about Victor Savage's death. ⁴⁰²You as good as admitted just now that you had done it. ⁴⁰³I'll forget it."

⁴⁰⁴“You can forget it or remember it, just as you like. ⁴⁰⁵I don't see you in the witnessbox. ⁴⁰⁶Quite another shaped box, my good Holmes, I assure you. ⁴⁰⁷It matters nothing to me that you should know how my nephew died. ⁴⁰⁸It's not him we are talking about. ⁴⁰⁹It's you.”

⁴¹⁰“Yes, yes.”

⁴¹¹“The fellow who came for me—I've forgotten his name—said that you contracted it down in the East End among the sailors.”

⁴¹²“I could only account for it so.”

⁴¹³“You are proud of your brains, Holmes, are you not? ⁴¹⁴Think yourself smart, don't you? ⁴¹⁵You came across someone who was smarter this time. ⁴¹⁶Now cast your mind back, Holmes. ⁴¹⁷Can you think of no other way you could have got this thing?”

⁴¹⁸“I can't think. ⁴¹⁹My mind is gone. ⁴²⁰For heaven's sake help me!”

⁴²¹“Yes, I will help you. ⁴²²I'll help you to understand just where you are and how you got there. ⁴²³I'd like you to know before you die.”

⁴²⁴“Give me something to ease my pain.”

⁴²⁵“Painful, is it? ⁴²⁶Yes, the coolies used to do some squealing towards the end. ⁴²⁷Takes you as cramp, I fancy.”

⁴²⁸“Yes, yes; it is cramp.”

⁴²⁹“Well, you can hear what I say, anyhow. ⁴³⁰Listen now! ⁴³¹Can you remember any unusual incident in your life just about the time your symptoms began?”

⁴³²“No, no; nothing.”

⁴³³“Think again.”

⁴³⁴“I'm too ill to think.”

⁴³⁵“Well, then, I'll help you. ⁴³⁶Did anything come by post?”

⁴³⁷“By post?”

⁴³⁸“A box by chance?”

⁴³⁹“I'm fainting—I'm gone!”

⁴⁴⁰“Listen, Holmes!” ⁴⁴¹There was a sound as if he was shaking the dying man, and it was all that I could do to hold myself quiet in my hiding-place. ⁴⁴²“You must hear me. ⁴⁴³You shall hear me. ⁴⁴⁴Do you remember a box—an ivory box? ⁴⁴⁵It came on Wednesday. ⁴⁴⁶You opened it—do you remember?”

⁴⁴⁷“Yes, yes, I opened it. ⁴⁴⁸There was a sharp spring inside it. ⁴⁴⁹Some joke—”

⁴⁵⁰“It was no joke, as you will find to your cost. ⁴⁵¹You fool, you would have it and you have got it. ⁴⁵²Who asked you to cross my path? ⁴⁵³If you had left me alone I would not have hurt you.”

⁴⁵⁴“I remember,” Holmes gasped. ⁴⁵⁵“The spring! ⁴⁵⁶It drew blood. ⁴⁵⁷This box—this on the table.”

⁴⁵⁸“The very one, by George! ⁴⁵⁹And it may as well leave the room in my pocket. ⁴⁶⁰There goes your last shred of evidence. ⁴⁶¹But you have the truth now, Holmes, and you can die with the knowledge that I killed you. ⁴⁶²You knew too much of the fate of Victor Savage, so I have sent you to share it. ⁴⁶³You are very near your end, Holmes. ⁴⁶⁴I will sit here and I will watch you die.”

⁴⁶⁵Holmes's voice had sunk to an almost inaudible whisper.

⁴⁶⁶"What is that?" said Smith. ⁴⁶⁷"Turn up the gas?" ⁴⁶⁸Ah, the shadows begin to fall, do they? ⁴⁶⁹Yes, I will turn it up, that I may see you the better." ⁴⁷⁰He crossed the room and the light suddenly brightened. ⁴⁷¹"Is there any other little service that I can do you, my friend?"

⁴⁷²"A match and a cigarette."

⁴⁷³I nearly called out in my joy and my amazement. ⁴⁷⁴He was speaking in his natural voice—a little weak, perhaps, but the very voice I knew. ⁴⁷⁵There was a long pause, and I felt that Culverton Smith was standing in silent amazement looking down at his companion.

⁴⁷⁶"What's the meaning of this?" I heard him say at last in a dry, rasping tone.

⁴⁷⁷"The best way of successfully acting a part is to be it," said Holmes. ⁴⁷⁸"I give you my word that for three days I have tasted neither food nor drink until you were good enough to pour me out that glass of water. ⁴⁷⁹But it is the tobacco which I find most irksome. ⁴⁸⁰Ah, here are some cigarettes." ⁴⁸¹I heard the striking of a match. ⁴⁸²"That is very much better. ⁴⁸³Halloa! halloa! ⁴⁸⁴Do I hear the step of a friend?"

⁴⁸⁵There were footfalls outside, the door opened, and Inspector Morton appeared.

⁴⁸⁶"All is in order and this is your man," said Holmes.

⁴⁸⁷The officer gave the usual cautions.

⁴⁸⁸"I arrest you on the charge of the murder of one Victor Savage," he concluded.

⁴⁸⁹"And you might add of the attempted murder of one Sherlock Holmes," remarked my friend with a chuckle. ⁴⁹⁰"To save an invalid trouble, Inspector, Mr. Culverton Smith was good enough to give our signal by turning up the gas. ⁴⁹¹By the way, the prisoner has a small box in the right-hand pocket of his coat which it would be as well to remove. ⁴⁹²Thank you. ⁴⁹³I would handle it gingerly if I were you. ⁴⁹⁴Put it down here. ⁴⁹⁵It may play its part in the trial."

⁴⁹⁶There was a sudden rush and a scuffle, followed by the clash of iron and a cry of pain.

⁴⁹⁷"You'll only get yourself hurt," said the inspector. ⁴⁹⁸"Stand still, will you?" ⁴⁹⁹There was the click of the closing handcuffs.

⁵⁰⁰"A nice trap!" cried the high, snarling voice. ⁵⁰¹"It will bring you into the dock, Holmes, not me. ⁵⁰²He asked me to come here to cure him. ⁵⁰³I was sorry for him and I came. ⁵⁰⁴Now he will pretend, no doubt, that I have said anything which he may invent which will corroborate his insane suspicions. ⁵⁰⁵You can lie as you like, Holmes. ⁵⁰⁶My word is always as good as yours."

⁵⁰⁷"Good heavens!" cried Holmes. ⁵⁰⁸"I had totally forgotten him. ⁵⁰⁹My dear Watson, I owe you a thousand apologies. ⁵¹⁰To think that I should have overlooked you! ⁵¹¹I need not introduce you to Mr. Culverton Smith, since I understand that you met somewhat earlier in the evening. ⁵¹²Have you the cab below? ⁵¹³I will follow you when I am dressed, for I may be of some use at the station.

⁵¹⁴"I never needed it more," said Holmes as he refreshed himself with a glass of claret and some biscuits in the intervals of his toilet. ⁵¹⁵"However, as you know, my habits are irregular, and such a feat means less to me than to most men. ⁵¹⁶It was very essential that I should impress Mrs. Hudson with the reality of my condition, since she was to convey it to you, and you in turn to him. ⁵¹⁷You won't be offended, Watson? ⁵¹⁸You will realize that among your many talents dissimulation finds no place, and that if you had shared my secret you would never have been able to impress Smith with the urgent necessity of his presence, which was the vital point of the whole scheme. ⁵¹⁹Knowing his vindictive nature, I was perfectly certain that he would come to look upon his handiwork."

⁵²⁰“But your appearance, Holmes—your ghastly face?”

⁵²¹“Three days of absolute fast does not improve one's beauty, Watson. ⁵²²For the rest, there is nothing which a sponge may not cure. ⁵²³With vaseline upon one's forehead, belladonna in one's eyes, rouge over the cheek-bones, and crusts of beeswax round one's lips, a very satisfying effect can be produced. ⁵²⁴Malingering is a subject upon which I have sometimes thought of writing a monograph. ⁵²⁵A little occasional talk about half-crowns, oysters, or any other extraneous subject produces a pleasing effect of delirium.”

⁵²⁶“But why would you not let me near you, since there was in truth no infection?”

⁵²⁷“Can you ask, my dear Watson? ⁵²⁸Do you imagine that I have no respect for your medical talents? ⁵²⁹Could I fancy that your astute judgment would pass a dying man who, however weak, had no rise of pulse or temperature? ⁵³⁰At four yards, I could deceive you. ⁵³¹If I failed to do so, who would bring my Smith within my grasp? ⁵³²No, Watson, I would not touch that box. ⁵³³You can just see if you look at it sideways where the sharp spring like a viper's tooth emerges as you open it. ⁵³⁴I dare say it was by some such device that poor Savage, who stood between this monster and a reversion, was done to death. ⁵³⁵My correspondence, however, is, as you know, a varied one, and I am somewhat upon my guard against any packages which reach me. ⁵³⁶It was clear to me, however, that by pretending that he had really succeeded in his design I might surprise a confession. ⁵³⁷That pretence I have carried out with the thoroughness of the true artist. ⁵³⁸Thank you, Watson, you must help me on with my coat. ⁵³⁹When we have finished at the police-station I think that something nutritious at Simpson's would not be out of place.”

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

¹“But why Turkish?” asked Mr. Sherlock Holmes, gazing fixedly at my boots. ²I was reclining in a cane-backed chair at the moment, and my protruded feet had attracted his ever-active attention.

³“English,” I answered in some surprise. ⁴“I got them at Latimer's, in Oxford Street.”

⁵Holmes smiled with an expression of weary patience.

⁶“The bath!” he said; “the bath! ⁷Why the relaxing and expensive Turkish rather than the invigorating home-made article?”

⁸“Because for the last few days I have been feeling rheumatic and old. ⁹A Turkish bath is what we call an alterative in medicine—a fresh starting-point, a cleanser of the system.

¹⁰“By the way, Holmes,” I added, “I have no doubt the connection between my boots and a Turkish bath is a perfectly self-evident one to a logical mind, and yet I should be obliged to you if you would indicate it.”

¹¹“The train of reasoning is not very obscure, Watson,” said Holmes with a mischievous twinkle. ¹²“It belongs to the same elementary class of deduction which I should illustrate if I were to ask you who shared your cab in your drive this morning.”

¹³“I don't admit that a fresh illustration is an explanation,” said I with some asperity.

¹⁴“Bravo, Watson! ¹⁵A very dignified and logical remonstrance. ¹⁶Let me see, what were the points? ¹⁷Take the last one first—the cab. ¹⁸You observe that you have some splashes on the left sleeve and shoulder of your coat. ¹⁹Had you sat in the centre of a hansom you would probably have had no splashes, and if you had they would certainly have been symmetrical. ²⁰Therefore it is clear that you sat at the side. ²¹Therefore it is equally clear that you had a companion.”

²²“That is very evident.”

²³“Absurdly commonplace, is it not?”

²⁴“But the boots and the bath?”

²⁵“Equally childish. ²⁶You are in the habit of doing up your boots in a certain way. ²⁷I see them on this occasion fastened with an elaborate double bow, which is not your usual method of tying them. ²⁸You have, therefore, had them off. ²⁹Who has tied them? ³⁰A bootmaker—or the boy at the bath. ³¹It is unlikely that it is the bootmaker, since your boots are nearly new. ³²Well, what remains? ³³The bath. ³⁴Absurd, is it not? ³⁵But, for all that, the Turkish bath has served a purpose.”

³⁶“What is that?”

³⁷“You say that you have had it because you need a change. ³⁸Let me suggest that you take one. ³⁹How would Lausanne do, my dear Watson—first-class tickets and all expenses paid on a princely scale?”

⁴⁰“Splendid! ⁴¹But why?”

⁴²Holmes leaned back in his armchair and took his notebook from his pocket.

⁴³“One of the most dangerous classes in the world,” said he, “is the drifting and friendless woman. ⁴⁴She is the most harmless and often the most useful of mortals, but she is the inevitable inciter of crime in others. ⁴⁵She is helpless. ⁴⁶She is migratory. ⁴⁷She has sufficient means to take her from country to country and from hotel to hotel. ⁴⁸She is lost, as often as not, in a maze of obscure pensions and

boardinghouses. ⁴⁹She is a stray chicken in a world of foxes. ⁵⁰When she is gobbled up she is hardly missed. ⁵¹I much fear that some evil has come to the Lady Frances Carfax."

⁵²I was relieved at this sudden descent from the general to the particular. Holmes consulted his notes.

⁵³"Lady Frances," he continued, "is the sole survivor of the direct family of the late Earl of Rufton.

⁵⁴The estates went, as you may remember, in the male line. ⁵⁵She was left with limited means, but with some very remarkable old Spanish jewellery of silver and curiously cut diamonds to which she was fondly attached—too attached, for she refused to leave them with her banker and always carried them about with her. ⁵⁶A rather pathetic figure, the Lady Frances, a beautiful woman, still in fresh middle age, and yet, by a strange change, the last derelict of what only twenty years ago was a goodly fleet."

⁵⁷"What has happened to her, then?"

⁵⁸"Ah, what has happened to the Lady Frances? ⁵⁹Is she alive or dead? ⁶⁰There is our problem. ⁶¹She is a lady of precise habits, and for four years it has been her invariable custom to write every second week to Miss Dobney, her old governess, who has long retired and lives in Camberwell. ⁶²It is this Miss Dobney who has consulted me. ⁶³Nearly five weeks have passed without a word. ⁶⁴The last letter was from the Hotel National at Lausanne. ⁶⁵Lady Frances seems to have left there and given no address. ⁶⁶The family are anxious, and as they are exceedingly wealthy no sum will be spared if we can clear the matter up."

⁶⁷"Is Miss Dobney the only source of information? ⁶⁸Surely she had other correspondents?"

⁶⁹"There is one correspondent who is a sure draw, Watson. ⁷⁰That is the bank. ⁷¹Single ladies must live, and their passbooks are compressed diaries. ⁷²She banks at Silvester's. ⁷³I have glanced over her account. ⁷⁴The last check but one paid her bill at Lausanne, but it was a large one and probably left her with cash in hand. ⁷⁵Only one check has been drawn since."

⁷⁶"To whom, and where?"

⁷⁷"To Miss Marie Devine. ⁷⁸There is nothing to show where the check was drawn. ⁷⁹It was cashed at the Credit Lyonnais at Montpellier less than three weeks ago. ⁸⁰The sum was fifty pounds."

⁸¹"And who is Miss Marie Devine?"

⁸²"That also I have been able to discover. ⁸³Miss Marie Devine was the maid of Lady Frances Carfax.

⁸⁴Why she should have paid her this check we have not yet determined. ⁸⁵I have no doubt, however, that your researches will soon clear the matter up."

⁸⁶"My researches!"

⁸⁷"Hence the health-giving expedition to Lausanne. ⁸⁸You know that I cannot possibly leave London while old Abrahams is in such mortal terror of his life. ⁸⁹Besides, on general principles it is best that I should not leave the country. ⁹⁰Scotland Yard feels lonely without me, and it causes an unhealthy excitement among the criminal classes. ⁹¹Go, then, my dear Watson, and if my humble counsel can ever be valued at so extravagant a rate as two pence a word, it waits your disposal night and day at the end of the Continental wire."

⁹²Two days later found me at the Hotel National at Lausanne, where I received every courtesy at the hands of M. Moser, the well-known manager. ⁹³Lady Frances, as he informed me, had stayed there for several weeks. ⁹⁴She had been much liked by all who met her. ⁹⁵Her age was not more than forty. ⁹⁶She was still handsome and bore every sign of having in her youth been a very lovely woman. ⁹⁷M. Moser knew nothing of any valuable jewellery, but it had been remarked by the servants that the heavy trunk in the lady's bedroom was always scrupulously locked. ⁹⁸Marie Devine, the maid, was as popular as her mistress. ⁹⁹She was actually engaged to one of the head waiters in the hotel, and there was no difficulty

in getting her address. ¹⁰⁰It was 11 Rue de Trajan, Montpellier. ¹⁰¹All this I jotted down and felt that Holmes himself could not have been more adroit in collecting his facts.

¹⁰²Only one corner still remained in the shadow. ¹⁰³No light which I possessed could clear up the cause for the lady's sudden departure. ¹⁰⁴She was very happy at Lausanne. ¹⁰⁵There was every reason to believe that she intended to remain for the season in her luxurious rooms overlooking the lake. ¹⁰⁶And yet she had left at a single day's notice, which involved her in the useless payment of a week's rent. ¹⁰⁷Only Jules Vibart, the lover of the maid, had any suggestion to offer. ¹⁰⁸He connected the sudden departure with the visit to the hotel a day or two before of a tall, dark, bearded man. ¹⁰⁹"Un sauvage—un véritable sauvage!" cried Jules Vibart. ¹¹⁰The man had rooms somewhere in the town. ¹¹¹He had been seen talking earnestly to Madame on the promenade by the lake. ¹¹²Then he had called. ¹¹³She had refused to see him. ¹¹⁴He was English, but of his name there was no record. ¹¹⁵Madame had left the place immediately afterwards. ¹¹⁶Jules Vibart, and, what was of more importance, Jules Vibart's sweetheart, thought that this call and the departure were cause and effect. ¹¹⁷Only one thing Jules would not discuss. ¹¹⁸That was the reason why Marie had left her mistress. ¹¹⁹Of that he could or would say nothing. ¹²⁰If I wished to know, I must go to Montpellier and ask her.

¹²¹So ended the first chapter of my inquiry. ¹²²The second was devoted to the place which Lady Frances Carfax had sought when she left Lausanne. ¹²³Concerning this there had been some secrecy, which confirmed the idea that she had gone with the intention of throwing someone off her track. ¹²⁴Otherwise why should not her luggage have been openly labelled for Baden? ¹²⁵Both she and it reached the Rhenish spa by some circuitous route. ¹²⁶This much I gathered from the manager of Cook's local office. ¹²⁷So to Baden I went, after dispatching to Holmes an account of all my proceedings and receiving in reply a telegram of half-humorous commendation.

¹²⁸At Baden the track was not difficult to follow. ¹²⁹Lady Frances had stayed at the Englischer Hof for a fortnight. ¹³⁰While there she had made the acquaintance of a Dr. Shlessinger and his wife, a missionary from South America. ¹³¹Like most lonely ladies, Lady Frances found her comfort and occupation in religion. ¹³²Dr. Shlessinger's remarkable personality, his whole hearted devotion, and the fact that he was recovering from a disease contracted in the exercise of his apostolic duties affected her deeply. ¹³³She had helped Mrs. Shlessinger in the nursing of the convalescent saint. ¹³⁴He spent his day, as the manager described it to me, upon a lounge-chair on the veranda, with an attendant lady upon either side of him. ¹³⁵He was preparing a map of the Holy Land, with special reference to the kingdom of the Midianites, upon which he was writing a monograph. ¹³⁶Finally, having improved much in health, he and his wife had returned to London, and Lady Frances had started thither in their company. ¹³⁷This was just three weeks before, and the manager had heard nothing since. ¹³⁸As to the maid, Marie, she had gone off some days beforehand in floods of tears, after informing the other maids that she was leaving service forever. ¹³⁹Dr. Shlessinger had paid the bill of the whole party before his departure.

¹⁴⁰"By the way," said the landlord in conclusion, "you are not the only friend of Lady Frances Carfax who is inquiring after her just now. ¹⁴¹Only a week or so ago we had a man here upon the same errand."

¹⁴²"Did he give a name?" I asked.

¹⁴³"None; but he was an Englishman, though of an unusual type."

¹⁴⁴"A savage?" said I, linking my facts after the fashion of my illustrious friend.

¹⁴⁵"Exactly. ¹⁴⁶That describes him very well. ¹⁴⁷He is a bulky, bearded, sunburned fellow, who looks as if he would be more at home in a farmers' inn than in a fashionable hotel. ¹⁴⁸A hard, fierce man, I should think, and one whom I should be sorry to offend."

¹⁴⁹Already the mystery began to define itself, as figures grow clearer with the lifting of a fog. ¹⁵⁰Here was this good and pious lady pursued from place to place by a sinister and unrelenting figure. ¹⁵¹She

feared him, or she would not have fled from Lausanne. ¹⁵²He had still followed. ¹⁵³Sooner or later he would overtake her. ¹⁵⁴Had he already overtaken her? ¹⁵⁵Was that the secret of her continued silence? ¹⁵⁶Could the good people who were her companions not screen her from his violence or his blackmail? ¹⁵⁷What horrible purpose, what deep design, lay behind this long pursuit? ¹⁵⁸There was the problem which I had to solve.

¹⁵⁹To Holmes I wrote showing how rapidly and surely I had got down to the roots of the matter. ¹⁶⁰In reply I had a telegram asking for a description of Dr. Shlessinger's left ear. ¹⁶¹Holmes's ideas of humour are strange and occasionally offensive, so I took no notice of his ill-timed jest—indeed, I had already reached Montpellier in my pursuit of the maid, Marie, before his message came.

¹⁶²I had no difficulty in finding the ex-servant and in learning all that she could tell me. ¹⁶³She was a devoted creature, who had only left her mistress because she was sure that she was in good hands, and because her own approaching marriage made a separation inevitable in any case. ¹⁶⁴Her mistress had, as she confessed with distress, shown some irritability of temper towards her during their stay in Baden, and had even questioned her once as if she had suspicions of her honesty, and this had made the parting easier than it would otherwise have been. ¹⁶⁵Lady Frances had given her fifty pounds as a wedding-present. ¹⁶⁶Like me, Marie viewed with deep distrust the stranger who had driven her mistress from Lausanne. ¹⁶⁷With her own eyes she had seen him seize the lady's wrist with great violence on the public promenade by the lake. ¹⁶⁸He was a fierce and terrible man. ¹⁶⁹She believed that it was out of dread of him that Lady Frances had accepted the escort of the Shlessingers to London. ¹⁷⁰She had never spoken to Marie about it, but many little signs had convinced the maid that her mistress lived in a state of continual nervous apprehension. ¹⁷¹So far she had got in her narrative, when suddenly she sprang from her chair and her face was convulsed with surprise and fear. ¹⁷²“See!” she cried. ¹⁷³“The miscreant follows still! ¹⁷⁴There is the very man of whom I speak.”

¹⁷⁵Through the open sitting-room window I saw a huge, swarthy man with a bristling black beard walking slowly down the centre of the street and staring eagerly at the numbers of the houses. ¹⁷⁶It was clear that, like myself, he was on the track of the maid. ¹⁷⁷Acting upon the impulse of the moment, I rushed out and accosted him.

¹⁷⁸“You are an Englishman,” I said.

¹⁷⁹“What if I am?” he asked with a most villainous scowl.

¹⁸⁰“May I ask what your name is?”

¹⁸¹“No, you may not,” said he with decision.

¹⁸²The situation was awkward, but the most direct way is often the best.

¹⁸³“Where is the Lady Frances Carfax?” I asked.

¹⁸⁴He stared at me with amazement.

¹⁸⁵“What have you done with her? ¹⁸⁶Why have you pursued her? ¹⁸⁷I insist upon an answer!” said I.

¹⁸⁸The fellow gave a bound of anger and sprang upon me like a tiger. ¹⁸⁹I have held my own in many a struggle, but the man had a grip of iron and the fury of a fiend. ¹⁹⁰His hand was on my throat and my senses were nearly gone before an unshaven French ouvrier in a blue blouse darted out from a cabaret opposite, with a cudgel in his hand, and struck my assailant a sharp crack over the forearm, which made him leave go his hold. ¹⁹¹He stood for an instant fuming with rage and uncertain whether he should not renew his attack. ¹⁹²Then, with a snarl of anger, he left me and entered the cottage from which I had just come. I turned to thank my preserver, who stood beside me in the roadway.

¹⁹³“Well, Watson,” said he, “a very pretty hash you have made of it! I rather think you had better come back with me to London by the night express.”

¹⁹⁴An hour afterwards, Sherlock Holmes, in his usual garb and style, was seated in my private room at the hotel. ¹⁹⁵His explanation of his sudden and opportune appearance was simplicity itself, for, finding that he could get away from London, he determined to head me off at the next obvious point of my travels. ¹⁹⁶In the disguise of a workingman he had sat in the cabaret waiting for my appearance.

¹⁹⁷“And a singularly consistent investigation you have made, my dear Watson,” said he. ¹⁹⁸“I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. ¹⁹⁹The total effect of your proceeding has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing.”

²⁰⁰“Perhaps you would have done no better,” I answered bitterly.

²⁰¹“There is no ‘perhaps’ about it. ²⁰²I have done better. ²⁰³Here is the Hon. Philip Green, who is a fellow-lodger with you in this hotel, and we may find him the starting-point for a more successful investigation.”

²⁰⁴A card had come up on a salver, and it was followed by the same bearded ruffian who had attacked me in the street. ²⁰⁵He started when he saw me.

²⁰⁶“What is this, Mr. Holmes?” he asked. ²⁰⁷“I had your note and I have come. ²⁰⁸But what has this man to do with the matter?”

²⁰⁹“This is my old friend and associate, Dr. Watson, who is helping us in this affair.”

²¹⁰The stranger held out a huge, sunburned hand, with a few words of apology.

²¹¹“I hope I didn't harm you. ²¹²When you accused me of hurting her I lost my grip of myself. ²¹³Indeed, I'm not responsible in these days. ²¹⁴My nerves are like live wires. ²¹⁵But this situation is beyond me. ²¹⁶What I want to know, in the first place, Mr. Holmes, is, how in the world you came to hear of my existence at all.”

²¹⁷“I am in touch with Miss Dobney, Lady Frances's governess.”

²¹⁸“Old Susan Dobney with the mob cap! ²¹⁹I remember her well.”

²²⁰“And she remembers you. ²²¹It was in the days before—before you found it better to go to South Africa.”

²²²“Ah, I see you know my whole story. ²²³I need hide nothing from you. ²²⁴I swear to you, Mr. Holmes, that there never was in this world a man who loved a woman with a more wholehearted love than I had for Frances. ²²⁵I was a wild youngster, I know—not worse than others of my class. ²²⁶But her mind was pure as snow. ²²⁷She could not bear a shadow of coarseness. ²²⁸So, when she came to hear of things that I had done, she would have no more to say to me. ²²⁹And yet she loved me—that is the wonder of it!—loved me well enough to remain single all her sainted days just for my sake alone. ²³⁰When the years had passed and I had made my money at Barberton I thought perhaps I could seek her out and soften her. ²³¹I had heard that she was still unmarried, I found her at Lausanne and tried all I knew. ²³²She weakened, I think, but her will was strong, and when next I called she had left the town. ²³³I traced her to Baden, and then after a time heard that her maid was here. ²³⁴I'm a rough fellow, fresh from a rough life, and when Dr. Watson spoke to me as he did I lost hold of myself for a moment. ²³⁵But for God's sake tell me what has become of the Lady Frances.”

²³⁶“That is for us to find out,” said Sherlock Holmes with peculiar gravity. ²³⁷“What is your London address, Mr. Green?”

²³⁸“The Langham Hotel will find me.”

²³⁹“Then may I recommend that you return there and be on hand in case I should want you? ²⁴⁰I have no desire to encourage false hopes, but you may rest assured that all that can be done will be done for the safety of Lady Frances. ²⁴¹I can say no more for the instant. I will leave you this card so that you may be able to keep in touch with us. ²⁴²Now, Watson, if you will pack your bag I will cable to Mrs. Hudson to make one of her best efforts for two hungry travellers at 7.30 to-morrow.”

²⁴³A telegram was awaiting us when we reached our Baker Street rooms, which Holmes read with an exclamation of interest and threw across to me. ²⁴⁴“Jagged or torn,” was the message, and the place of origin, Baden.

²⁴⁵“What is this?” I asked.

²⁴⁶“It is everything,” Holmes answered. ²⁴⁷“You may remember my seemingly irrelevant question as to this clerical gentleman's left ear. ²⁴⁸You did not answer it.”

²⁴⁹“I had left Baden and could not inquire.”

²⁵⁰“Exactly. ²⁵¹For this reason I sent a duplicate to the manager of the Englischer Hof, whose answer lies here.”

²⁵²“What does it show?”

²⁵³“It shows, my dear Watson, that we are dealing with an exceptionally astute and dangerous man. ²⁵⁴The Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, missionary from South America, is none other than Holy Peters, one of the most unscrupulous rascals that Australia has ever evolved—and for a young country it has turned out some very finished types. ²⁵⁵His particular specialty is the beguiling of lonely ladies by playing upon their religious feelings, and his so-called wife, an Englishwoman named Fraser, is a worthy helpmate. ²⁵⁶The nature of his tactics suggested his identity to me, and this physical peculiarity—he was badly bitten in a saloon-fight at Adelaide in '89—confirmed my suspicion. ²⁵⁷This poor lady is in the hands of a most infernal couple, who will stick at nothing, Watson. ²⁵⁸That she is already dead is a very likely supposition. ²⁵⁹If not, she is undoubtedly in some sort of confinement and unable to write to Miss Dobney or her other friends. ²⁶⁰It is always possible that she never reached London, or that she has passed through it, but the former is improbable, as, with their system of registration, it is not easy for foreigners to play tricks with the Continental police; and the latter is also unlikely, as these rouges could not hope to find any other place where it would be as easy to keep a person under restraint. ²⁶¹All my instincts tell me that she is in London, but as we have at present no possible means of telling where, we can only take the obvious steps, eat our dinner, and possess our souls in patience. ²⁶²Later in the evening I will stroll down and have a word with friend Lestrade at Scotland Yard.”

²⁶³But neither the official police nor Holmes's own small but very efficient organization sufficed to clear away the mystery. ²⁶⁴Amid the crowded millions of London the three persons we sought were as completely obliterated as if they had never lived. ²⁶⁵Advertisements were tried, and failed. ²⁶⁶Clues were followed, and led to nothing. ²⁶⁷Every criminal resort which Shlessinger might frequent was drawn in vain. ²⁶⁸His old associates were watched, but they kept clear of him. ²⁶⁹And then suddenly, after a week of helpless suspense there came a flash of light. ²⁷⁰A silver-and-brilliant pendant of old Spanish design had been pawned at Bovington's, in Westminster Road. ²⁷¹The pawnier was a large, clean-shaven man of clerical appearance. ²⁷²His name and address were demonstrably false. ²⁷³The ear had escaped notice, but the description was surely that of Shlessinger.

²⁷⁴Three times had our bearded friend from the Langham called for news—the third time within an hour of this fresh development. ²⁷⁵His clothes were getting looser on his great body. ²⁷⁶He seemed to be wilting away in his anxiety. ²⁷⁷“If you will only give me something to do!” was his constant wail. ²⁷⁸At last Holmes could oblige him.

²⁷⁹“He has begun to pawn the jewels. ²⁸⁰We should get him now.”

²⁸¹“But does this mean that any harm has befallen the Lady Frances?”

²⁸²Holmes shook his head very gravely.

²⁸³“Supposing that they have held her prisoner up to now, it is clear that they cannot let her loose without their own destruction. ²⁸⁴We must prepare for the worst.”

²⁸⁵“What can I do?”

²⁸⁶“These people do not know you by sight?”

²⁸⁷“No.”

²⁸⁸“It is possible that he will go to some other pawnbroker in the future. ²⁸⁹In that case, we must begin again. ²⁹⁰On the other hand, he has had a fair price and no questions asked, so if he is in need of ready-money he will probably come back to Bovington's. ²⁹¹I will give you a note to them, and they will let you wait in the shop. ²⁹²If the fellow comes you will follow him home. ²⁹³But no indiscretion, and, above all, no violence. ²⁹⁴I put you on your honour that you will take no step without my knowledge and consent.”

²⁹⁵For two days the Hon. Philip Green (he was, I may mention, the son of the famous admiral of that name who commanded the Sea of Azof fleet in the Crimean War) brought us no news. ²⁹⁶On the evening of the third he rushed into our sitting-room, pale, trembling, with every muscle of his powerful frame quivering with excitement.

²⁹⁷“We have him! ²⁹⁸We have him!” he cried.

²⁹⁹He was incoherent in his agitation. ³⁰⁰Holmes soothed him with a few words and thrust him into an armchair.

³⁰¹“Come, now, give us the order of events,” said he.

³⁰²“She came only an hour ago. ³⁰³It was the wife, this time, but the pendant she brought was the fellow of the other. ³⁰⁴She is a tall, pale woman, with ferret eyes.”

³⁰⁵“That is the lady,” said Holmes.

³⁰⁶“She left the office and I followed her. ³⁰⁷She walked up the Kennington Road, and I kept behind her. ³⁰⁸Presently she went into a shop. ³⁰⁹Mr. Holmes, it was an undertaker's.”

³¹⁰My companion started. ³¹¹“Well?” he asked in that vibrant voice which told of the fiery soul behind the cold gray face.

³¹²“She was talking to the woman behind the counter. ³¹³I entered as well. ³¹⁴‘It is late,’ I heard her say, or words to that effect. ³¹⁵The woman was excusing herself. ³¹⁶‘It should be there before now,’ she answered. ³¹⁷‘It took longer, being out of the ordinary.’ ³¹⁸They both stopped and looked at me, so I asked some questions and then left the shop.”

³¹⁹“You did excellently well. ³²⁰What happened next?”

³²¹“The woman came out, but I had hid myself in a doorway. ³²²Her suspicions had been aroused, I think, for she looked round her. ³²³Then she called a cab and got in. ³²⁴I was lucky enough to get another and so to follow her. ³²⁵She got down at last at No. 36, Poultny Square, Brixton. ³²⁶I drove past, left my cab at the corner of the square, and watched the house.”

³²⁷“Did you see anyone?”

³²⁸“The windows were all in darkness save one on the lower floor. ³²⁹The blind was down, and I could not see in. ³³⁰I was standing there, wondering what I should do next, when a covered van drove up with

two men in it. ³³¹They descended, took something out of the van, and carried it up the steps to the hall door. ³³²Mr. Holmes, it was a coffin.”

³³³“Ah!”

³³⁴“For an instant I was on the point of rushing in. ³³⁵The door had been opened to admit the men and their burden. ³³⁶It was the woman who had opened it. ³³⁷But as I stood there she caught a glimpse of me, and I think that she recognized me. ³³⁸I saw her start, and she hastily closed the door. ³³⁹I remembered my promise to you, and here I am.”

³⁴⁰“You have done excellent work,” said Holmes, scribbling a few words upon a half-sheet of paper.

³⁴¹“We can do nothing legal without a warrant, and you can serve the cause best by taking this note down to the authorities and getting one. ³⁴²There may be some difficulty, but I should think that the sale of the jewellery should be sufficient. ³⁴³Lestrade will see to all details.”

³⁴⁴“But they may murder her in the meanwhile. ³⁴⁵What could the coffin mean, and for whom could it be but for her?”

³⁴⁶“We will do all that can be done, Mr. Green. ³⁴⁷Not a moment will be lost. ³⁴⁸Leave it in our hands.

³⁴⁹Now Watson,” he added as our client hurried away, “he will set the regular forces on the move. ³⁵⁰We are, as usual, the irregulars, and we must take our own line of action. ³⁵¹The situation strikes me as so desperate that the most extreme measures are justified. ³⁵²Not a moment is to be lost in getting to Poultny Square.

³⁵³“Let us try to reconstruct the situation,” said he as we drove swiftly past the Houses of Parliament and over Westminster Bridge. ³⁵⁴“These villains have coaxed this unhappy lady to London, after first alienating her from her faithful maid. ³⁵⁵If she has written any letters they have been intercepted. ³⁵⁶Through some confederate they have engaged a furnished house. ³⁵⁷Once inside it, they have made her a prisoner, and they have become possessed of the valuable jewellery which has been their object from the first. ³⁵⁸Already they have begun to sell part of it, which seems safe enough to them, since they have no reason to think that anyone is interested in the lady's fate. ³⁵⁹When she is released she will, of course, denounce them. ³⁶⁰Therefore, she must not be released. ³⁶¹But they cannot keep her under lock and key forever. ³⁶²So murder is their only solution.”

³⁶³“That seems very clear.”

³⁶⁴“Now we will take another line of reasoning. ³⁶⁵When you follow two separate chains of thought, Watson, you will find some point of intersection which should approximate to the truth. ³⁶⁶We will start now, not from the lady but from the coffin and argue backward. ³⁶⁷That incident proves, I fear, beyond all doubt that the lady is dead. ³⁶⁸It points also to an orthodox burial with proper accompaniment of medical certificate and official sanction. ³⁶⁹Had the lady been obviously murdered, they would have buried her in a hole in the back garden. ³⁷⁰But here all is open and regular. ³⁷¹What does this mean? ³⁷²Surely that they have done her to death in some way which has deceived the doctor and simulated a natural end—poisoning, perhaps. ³⁷³And yet how strange that they should ever let a doctor approach her unless he were a confederate, which is hardly a credible proposition.”

³⁷⁴“Could they have forged a medical certificate?”

³⁷⁵“Dangerous, Watson, very dangerous. ³⁷⁶No, I hardly see them doing that. ³⁷⁷Pull up, cabby! ³⁷⁸This is evidently the undertaker's, for we have just passed the pawnbroker's. ³⁷⁹Would go in, Watson? ³⁸⁰Your appearance inspires confidence. ³⁸¹Ask what hour the Poultny Square funeral takes place to-morrow.”

³⁸²The woman in the shop answered me without hesitation that it was to be at eight o'clock in the morning. ³⁸³“You see, Watson, no mystery; everything above-board! ³⁸⁴In some way the legal forms

have undoubtedly been complied with, and they think that they have little to fear. ³⁸⁵Well, there's nothing for it now but a direct frontal attack. ³⁸⁶Are you armed?"

³⁸⁷"My stick!"

³⁸⁸"Well, well, we shall be strong enough. ³⁸⁹'Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just.' ³⁹⁰We simply can't afford to wait for the police or to keep within the four corners of the law. ³⁹¹You can drive off, cabby. ³⁹²Now, Watson, we'll just take our luck together, as we have occasionally in the past."

³⁹³He had rung loudly at the door of a great dark house in the centre of Poultny Square. ³⁹⁴It was opened immediately, and the figure of a tall woman was outlined against the dim-lit hall.

³⁹⁵"Well, what do you want?" she asked sharply, peering at us through the darkness.

³⁹⁶"I want to speak to Dr. Shlessinger," said Holmes.

³⁹⁷"There is no such person here," she answered, and tried to close the door, but Holmes had jammed it with his foot.

³⁹⁸"Well, I want to see the man who lives here, whatever he may call himself," said Holmes firmly.

³⁹⁹She hesitated. ⁴⁰⁰Then she threw open the door. ⁴⁰¹"Well, come in!" said she. ⁴⁰²"My husband is not afraid to face any man in the world." ⁴⁰³She closed the door behind us and showed us into a sitting-room on the right side of the hall, turning up the gas as she left us. ⁴⁰⁴"Mr. Peters will be with you in an instant," she said.

⁴⁰⁵Her words were literally true, for we had hardly time to look around the dusty and moth-eaten apartment in which we found ourselves before the door opened and a big, clean-shaven bald-headed man stepped lightly into the room. ⁴⁰⁶He had a large red face, with pendulous cheeks, and a general air of superficial benevolence which was marred by a cruel, vicious mouth.

⁴⁰⁷"There is surely some mistake here, gentlemen," he said in an unctuous, make-everything-easy voice.

⁴⁰⁸"I fancy that you have been misdirected. ⁴⁰⁹Possibly if you tried farther down the street—"

⁴¹⁰"That will do; we have no time to waste," said my companion firmly. ⁴¹¹"You are Henry Peters, of Adelaide, late the Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, of Baden and South America. ⁴¹²I am as sure of that as that my own name is Sherlock Holmes."

⁴¹³Peters, as I will now call him, started and stared hard at his formidable pursuer. ⁴¹⁴"I guess your name does not frighten me, Mr. Holmes," said he coolly. ⁴¹⁵"When a man's conscience is easy you can't rattle him. ⁴¹⁶What is your business in my house?"

⁴¹⁷"I want to know what you have done with the Lady Frances Carfax, whom you brought away with you from Baden."

⁴¹⁸"I'd be very glad if you could tell me where that lady may be," Peters answered coolly. ⁴¹⁹"I've a bill against her for a nearly a hundred pounds, and nothing to show for it but a couple of trumpery pendants that the dealer would hardly look at. ⁴¹⁹She attached herself to Mrs. Peters and me at Baden—it is a fact that I was using another name at the time—and she stuck on to us until we came to London. ⁴²⁰I paid her bill and her ticket. ⁴²¹Once in London, she gave us the slip, and, as I say, left these out-of-date jewels to pay her bills. ⁴²²You find her, Mr. Holmes, and I'm your debtor."

⁴²³In mean to find her," said Sherlock Holmes. ⁴²⁴"I'm going through this house till I do find her."

⁴²⁵"Where is your warrant?"

⁴²⁶Holmes half drew a revolver from his pocket. ⁴²⁷"This will have to serve till a better one comes."

⁴²⁸“Why, you're a common burglar.”

⁴²⁹“So you might describe me,” said Holmes cheerfully. ⁴³⁰“My companion is also a dangerous ruffian.

⁴³¹And together we are going through your house.”

⁴³²Our opponent opened the door.

⁴³³“Fetch a policeman, Annie!” said he. ⁴³⁴There was a whisk of feminine skirts down the passage, and the hall door was opened and shut.

⁴³⁵“Our time is limited, Watson,” said Holmes. ⁴³⁶“If you try to stop us, Peters, you will most certainly get hurt. ⁴³⁷Where is that coffin which was brought into your house?”

⁴³⁸“What do you want with the coffin? ⁴³⁹It is in use. ⁴⁴⁰There is a body in it.”

⁴⁴¹“I must see the body.”

⁴⁴²“Never with my consent.”

⁴⁴³“Then without it.” ⁴⁴⁴With a quick movement Holmes pushed the fellow to one side and passed into the hall. ⁴⁴⁵A door half opened stood immediately before us. ⁴⁴⁶We entered. ⁴⁴⁷It was the dining-room. ⁴⁴⁸On the table, under a half-lit chandelier, the coffin was lying. ⁴⁴⁹Holmes turned up the gas and raised the lid. ⁴⁵⁰Deep down in the recesses of the coffin lay an emaciated figure. ⁴⁵¹The glare from the lights above beat down upon an aged and withered face. ⁴⁵²By no possible process of cruelty, starvation, or disease could this worn-out wreck be the still beautiful Lady Frances. ⁴⁵³Holmes's face showed his amazement, and also his relief.

⁴⁵⁴“Thank God!” he muttered. ⁴⁵⁵“It's someone else.”

⁴⁵⁶“Ah, you've blundered badly for once, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said Peters, who had followed us into the room.

⁴⁵⁷“Who is the dead woman?”

⁴⁵⁸“Well, if you really must know, she is an old nurse of my wife's, Rose Spender by name, whom we found in the Brixton Workhouse Infirmary. ⁴⁵⁹We brought her round here, called in Dr. Horsom, of 13 Firbank Villas—mind you take the address, Mr. Holmes—and had her carefully tended, as Christian folk should. ⁴⁶⁰On the third day she died—certificate says senile decay—but that's only the doctor's opinion, and of course you know better. ⁴⁶¹We ordered her funeral to be carried out by Stimson and Co., of the Kennington Road, who will bury her at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. ⁴⁶²Can you pick any hole in that, Mr. Holmes? ⁴⁶³You've made a silly blunder, and you may as well own up to it. ⁴⁶⁴I'd give something for a photograph of your gaping, staring face when you pulled aside that lid expecting to see the Lady Frances Carfax and only found a poor old woman of ninety.”

⁴⁶⁵Holmes's expression was as impassive as ever under the jeers of his antagonist, but his clenched hands betrayed his acute annoyance.

⁴⁶⁶“I am going through your house,” said he.

⁴⁶⁷“Are you, though!” cried Peters as a woman's voice and heavy steps sounded in the passage. ⁴⁶⁸“We'll soon see about that. ⁴⁶⁹This way, officers, if you please. ⁴⁷⁰These men have forced their way into my house, and I cannot get rid of them. ⁴⁷¹Help me to put them out.”

⁴⁷²A sergeant and a constable stood in the doorway. ⁴⁷³Holmes drew his card from his case.

⁴⁷⁴“This is my name and address. ⁴⁷⁵This is my friend, Dr. Watson.”

⁴⁷⁶“Bless you, sir, we know you very well,” said the sergeant, “but you can't stay here without a warrant.”

⁴⁷⁷“Of course not. ⁴⁷⁸I quite understand that.”

⁴⁷⁹“Arrest him!” cried Peters.

⁴⁸⁰“We know where to lay our hands on this gentleman if he is wanted,” said the sergeant majestically, “but you'll have to go, Mr. Holmes.”

⁴⁸¹“Yes, Watson, we shall have to go.”

⁴⁸²A minute later we were in the street once more. ⁴⁸³Holmes was as cool as ever, but I was hot with anger and humiliation. ⁴⁸⁴The sergeant had followed us.

⁴⁸⁵“Sorry, Mr. Holmes, but that's the law.”

⁴⁸⁶“Exactly, Sergeant, you could not do otherwise.”

⁴⁸⁷“I expect there was good reason for your presence there. ⁴⁸⁸If there is anything I can do—”

⁴⁸⁹“It's a missing lady, Sergeant, and we think she is in that house. ⁴⁹⁰I expect a warrant presently.”

⁴⁹¹“Then I'll keep my eye on the parties, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁹²If anything comes along, I will surely let you know.”

⁴⁹³It was only nine o'clock, and we were off full cry upon the trail at once. ⁴⁹⁴First we drove to Brixton Workhoused Infirmary, where we found that it was indeed the truth that a charitable couple had called some days before, that they had claimed an imbecile old woman as a former servant, and that they had obtained permission to take her away with them. ⁴⁹⁵No surprise was expressed at the news that she had since died.

⁴⁹⁶The doctor was our next goal. ⁴⁹⁷He had been called in, had found the woman dying of pure senility, had actually seen her pass away, and had signed the certificate in due form. ⁴⁹⁸“I assure you that everything was perfectly normal and there was no room for foul play in the matter,” said he. ⁴⁹⁹Nothing in the house had struck him as suspicious save that for people of their class it was remarkable that they should have no servant. ⁵⁰⁰So far and no further went the doctor.

⁵⁰¹Finally we found our way to Scotland Yard. ⁵⁰²There had been difficulties of procedure in regard to the warrant. ⁵⁰³Some delay was inevitable. ⁵⁰⁴The magistrate's signature might not be obtained until next morning. ⁵⁰⁵If Holmes would call about nine he could go down with Lestrade and see it acted upon. ⁵⁰⁶So ended the day, save that near midnight our friend, the sergeant, called to say that he had seen flickering lights here and there in the windows of the great dark house, but that no one had left it and none had entered. ⁵⁰⁷We could but pray for patience and wait for the morrow.

⁵⁰⁸Sherlock Holmes was too irritable for conversation and too restless for sleep. ⁵⁰⁹I left him smoking hard, with his heavy, dark brows knotted together, and his long, nervous fingers tapping upon the arms of his chair, as he turned over in his mind every possible solution of the mystery. ⁵¹⁰Several times in the course of the night I heard him prowling about the house. ⁵¹¹Finally, just after I had been called in the morning, he rushed into my room. ⁵¹²He was in his dressing-gown, but his pale, hollow-eyed face told me that his night had been a sleepless one.

⁵¹³“What time was the funeral? ⁵¹⁴Eight, was it not?” he asked eagerly. ⁵¹⁵“Well, it is 7.20 now. ⁵¹⁶Good heavens, Watson, what has become of any brains that God has given me? ⁵¹⁷Quick, man, quick! ⁵¹⁸It's life or death—a hundred chances on death to one on life. ⁵¹⁹I'll never forgive myself, never, if we are too late!”

⁵²⁰Five minutes had not passed before we were flying in a hansom down Baker Street. ⁵²¹But even so it was twenty-five to eight as we passed Big Ben, and eight struck as we tore down the Brixton Road. ⁵²²But others were late as well as we. ⁵²³Ten minutes after the hour the hearse was still standing at the door of the house, and even as our foaming horse came to a halt the coffin, supported by three men, appeared on the threshold. ⁵²⁴Holmes darted forward and barred their way.

⁵²⁵“Take it back!” he cried, laying his hand on the breast of the foremost. ⁵²⁶“Take it back this instant!”

⁵²⁷“What the devil do you mean? ⁵²⁸Once again I ask you, where is your warrant?” shouted the furious Peters, his big red face glaring over the farther end of the coffin.

⁵²⁹“The warrant is on its way. ⁵³⁰The coffin shall remain in the house until it comes.”

⁵³¹The authority in Holmes's voice had its effect upon the bearers. ⁵³²Peters had suddenly vanished into the house, and they obeyed these new orders. ⁵³³“Quick, Watson, quick! ⁵³⁴Here is a screw-driver!” he shouted as the coffin was replaced upon the table. ⁵³⁵“Here's one for you, my man! ⁵³⁶A sovereign if the lid comes off in a minute! ⁵³⁷Ask no questions—work away! ⁵³⁸That's good! ⁵³⁹Another! ⁵⁴⁰And another! ⁵⁴¹Now pull all together! ⁵⁴²It's giving! ⁵⁴³It's giving! ⁵⁴⁴Ah, that does it at last.”

⁵⁴⁵With a united effort we tore off the coffin-lid. ⁵⁴⁶As we did so there came from the inside a stupefying and overpowering smell of chloroform. ⁵⁴⁷A body lay within, its head all wreathed in cotton-wool, which had been soaked in the narcotic. ⁵⁴⁸Holmes plucked it off and disclosed the statuesque face of a handsome and spiritual woman of middle age. ⁵⁴⁹In an instant he had passed his arm round the figure and raised her to a sitting position.

⁵⁵⁰“Is she gone, Watson? ⁵⁵¹Is there a spark left? ⁵⁵²Surely we are not too late!”

⁵⁵³For half an hour it seemed that we were. ⁵⁵⁴What with actual suffocation, and what with the poisonous fumes of the chloroform, the Lady Frances seemed to have passed the last point of recall. ⁵⁵⁵And then, at last, with artificial respiration, with injected ether, and with every device that science could suggest, some flutter of life, some quiver of the eyelids, some dimming of a mirror, spoke of the slowly returning life. ⁵⁵⁶A cab had driven up, and Holmes, parting the blind, looked out at it. ⁵⁵⁷“Here is Lestrade with his warrant,” said he. ⁵⁵⁸“He will find that his birds have flown. ⁵⁵⁹And here,” he added as a heavy step hurried along the passage, “is someone who has a better right to nurse this lady than we have. ⁵⁶⁰Good morning, Mr. Green; I think that the sooner we can move the Lady Frances the better. ⁵⁶¹Meanwhile, the funeral may proceed, and the poor old woman who still lies in that coffin may go to her last resting-place alone.”

⁵⁶²“Should you care to add the case to your annals, my dear Watson,” said Holmes that evening, “it can only be as an example of that temporary eclipse to which even the best-balanced mind may be exposed. ⁵⁶³Such slips are common to all mortals, and the greatest is he who can recognize and repair them. ⁵⁶⁴To this modified credit I may, perhaps, make some claim. ⁵⁶⁵My night was haunted by the thought that somewhere a clue, a strange sentence, a curious observation, had come under my notice and had been too easily dismissed. ⁵⁶⁶Then, suddenly, in the gray of the morning, the words came back to me. ⁵⁶⁷It was the remark of the undertaker's wife, as reported by Philip Green. ⁵⁶⁸She had said, ‘It should be there before now. ⁵⁶⁹It took longer, being out of the ordinary.’ ⁵⁷⁰It was the coffin of which she spoke. ⁵⁷¹It had been out of the ordinary. ⁵⁷²That could only mean that it had been made to some special measurement. ⁵⁷³But why? ⁵⁷⁴Why? ⁵⁷⁵Then in an instant I remembered the deep sides, and the little wasted figure at the bottom. ⁵⁷⁶Why so large a coffin for so small a body? ⁵⁷⁷To leave room for another body. ⁵⁷⁸Both would be buried under the one certificate. ⁵⁷⁹It had all been so clear, if only my own sight had not been dimmed. ⁵⁸⁰At eight the Lady Frances would be buried. ⁵⁸¹Our one chance was to stop the coffin before it left the house.

⁵⁸²“It was a desperate chance that we might find her alive, but it was a chance, as the result showed.
⁵⁸³These people had never, to my knowledge, done a murder. ⁵⁸⁴They might shrink from actual violence
at the last. ⁵⁸⁵They could bury her with no sign of how she met her end, and even if she were exhumed
there was a chance for them. ⁵⁸⁶I hoped that such considerations might prevail with them. ⁵⁸⁷You can
reconstruct the scene well enough. ⁵⁸⁸You saw the horrible den upstairs, where the poor lady had been
kept so long. ⁵⁸⁹They rushed in and overpowered her with their chloroform, carried her down, poured
more into the coffin to insure against her waking, and then screwed down the lid. ⁵⁹⁰A clever device,
Watson. ⁵⁹¹It is new to me in the annals of crime. ⁵⁹²If our ex-missionary friends escape the clutches of
Lestrade, I shall expect to hear of some brilliant incidents in their future career.”

The Adventure of the Devil's Foot

¹In recording from time to time some of the curious experiences and interesting recollections which I associate with my long and intimate friendship with Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have continually been faced by difficulties caused by his own aversion to publicity. ²To his sombre and cynical spirit all popular applause was always abhorrent, and nothing amused him more at the end of a successful case than to hand over the actual exposure to some orthodox official, and to listen with a mocking smile to the general chorus of misplaced congratulation. ³It was indeed this attitude upon the part of my friend and certainly not any lack of interesting material which has caused me of late years to lay very few of my records before the public. ⁴My participation in some of his adventures was always a privilege which entailed discretion and reticence upon me.

⁵It was, then, with considerable surprise that I received a telegram from Holmes last Tuesday—he has never been known to write where a telegram would serve—in the following terms:

⁶Why not tell them of the Cornish horror—strangest case I have handled.

⁷I have no idea what backward sweep of memory had brought the matter fresh to his mind, or what freak had caused him to desire that I should recount it; but I hasten, before another cancelling telegram may arrive, to hunt out the notes which give me the exact details of the case and to lay the narrative before my readers.

⁸It was, then, in the spring of the year 1897 that Holmes's iron constitution showed some symptoms of giving way in the face of constant hard work of a most exacting kind, aggravated, perhaps, by occasional indiscretions of his own. ⁹In March of that year Dr. Moore Agar, of Harley Street, whose dramatic introduction to Holmes I may some day recount, gave positive injunctions that the famous private agent lay aside all his cases and surrender himself to complete rest if he wished to avert an absolute breakdown. ¹⁰The state of his health was not a matter in which he himself took the faintest interest, for his mental detachment was absolute, but he was induced at last, on the threat of being permanently disqualified from work, to give himself a complete change of scene and air. ¹¹Thus it was that in the early spring of that year we found ourselves together in a small cottage near Poldhu Bay, at the further extremity of the Cornish peninsula.

¹²It was a singular spot, and one peculiarly well suited to the grim humour of my patient. ¹³From the windows of our little whitewashed house, which stood high upon a grassy headland, we looked down upon the whole sinister semicircle of Mounts Bay, that old death trap of sailing vessels, with its fringe of black cliffs and surge-swept reefs on which innumerable seamen have met their end. ¹⁴With a northerly breeze it lies placid and sheltered, inviting the storm-tossed craft to tack into it for rest and protection.

¹⁵Then come the sudden swirl round of the wind, the blistering gale from the south-west, the dragging anchor, the lee shore, and the last battle in the creaming breakers. ¹⁶The wise mariner stands far out from that evil place.

¹⁷On the land side our surroundings were as sombre as on the sea. ¹⁸It was a country of rolling moors, lonely and dun-colored, with an occasional church tower to mark the site of some old-world village. ¹⁹In every direction upon these moors there were traces of some vanished race which had passed utterly away, and left as its sole record strange monuments of stone, irregular mounds which contained the burned ashes of the dead, and curious earthworks which hinted at prehistoric strife. ²⁰The glamour and mystery of the place, with its sinister atmosphere of forgotten nations, appealed to the imagination of my friend, and he spent much of his time in long walks and solitary meditations upon the moor. ²¹The ancient Cornish language had also arrested his attention, and he had, I remember, conceived the idea

that it was akin to the Chaldean, and had been largely derived from the Phoenician traders in tin. ²²He had received a consignment of books upon philology and was settling down to develop this thesis when suddenly, to my sorrow and to his unfeigned delight, we found ourselves, even in that land of dreams, plunged into a problem at our very doors which was more intense, more engrossing, and infinitely more mysterious than any of those which had driven us from London. ²³Our simple life and peaceful, healthy routine were violently interrupted, and we were precipitated into the midst of a series of events which caused the utmost excitement not only in Cornwall but throughout the whole west of England. ²⁴Many of my readers may retain some recollection of what was called at the time "The Cornish Horror," though a most imperfect account of the matter reached the London press. ²⁵Now, after thirteen years, I will give the true details of this inconceivable affair to the public.

²⁶I have said that scattered towers marked the villages which dotted this part of Cornwall. ²⁷The nearest of these was the hamlet of Tredannick Wollas, where the cottages of a couple of hundred inhabitants clustered round an ancient, moss-grown church. ²⁸The vicar of the parish, Mr. Roundhay, was something of an archaeologist, and as such Holmes had made his acquaintance. ²⁹He was a middle-aged man, portly and affable, with a considerable fund of local lore. ³⁰At his invitation we had taken tea at the vicarage and had come to know, also, Mr. Mortimer Tregennis, an independent gentleman, who increased the clergyman's scanty resources by taking rooms in his large, straggling house. ³¹The vicar, being a bachelor, was glad to come to such an arrangement, though he had little in common with his lodger, who was a thin, dark, spectacled man, with a stoop which gave the impression of actual, physical deformity. ³²I remember that during our short visit we found the vicar garrulous, but his lodger strangely reticent, a sad-faced, introspective man, sitting with averted eyes, brooding apparently upon his own affairs.

³³These were the two men who entered abruptly into our little sitting-room on Tuesday, March the 16th, shortly after our breakfast hour, as we were smoking together, preparatory to our daily excursion upon the moors.

³⁴"Mr. Holmes," said the vicar in an agitated voice, "the most extraordinary and tragic affair has occurred during the night. ³⁵It is the most unheard-of business. ³⁶We can only regard it as a special Providence that you should chance to be here at the time, for in all England you are the one man we need."

³⁷I glared at the intrusive vicar with no very friendly eyes; but Holmes took his pipe from his lips and sat up in his chair like an old hound who hears the view-halloa. ³⁸He waved his hand to the sofa, and our palpitating visitor with his agitated companion sat side by side upon it. ³⁹Mr. Mortimer Tregennis was more self-contained than the clergyman, but the twitching of his thin hands and the brightness of his dark eyes showed that they shared a common emotion.

⁴⁰"Shall I speak or you?" he asked of the vicar.

⁴¹"Well, as you seem to have made the discovery, whatever it may be, and the vicar to have had it second-hand, perhaps you had better do the speaking," said Holmes.

⁴²I glanced at the hastily clad clergyman, with the formally dressed lodger seated beside him, and was amused at the surprise which Holmes's simple deduction had brought to their faces.

⁴³"Perhaps I had best say a few words first," said the vicar, "and then you can judge if you will listen to the details from Mr. Tregennis, or whether we should not hasten at once to the scene of this mysterious affair. ⁴⁴I may explain, then, that our friend here spent last evening in the company of his two brothers, Owen and George, and of his sister Brenda, at their house of Tredannick Wartha, which is near the old stone cross upon the moor. ⁴⁵He left them shortly after ten o'clock, playing cards round the dining-room table, in excellent health and spirits. ⁴⁶This morning, being an early riser, he walked in that direction before breakfast and was overtaken by the carriage of Dr. Richards, who explained that he had just been

sent for on a most urgent call to Tredannick Wartha. ⁴⁷Mr. Mortimer Tregennis naturally went with him. ⁴⁸When he arrived at Tredannick Wartha he found an extraordinary state of things. ⁴⁹His two brothers and his sister were seated round the table exactly as he had left them, the cards still spread in front of them and the candles burned down to their sockets. ⁵⁰The sister lay back stone-dead in her chair, while the two brothers sat on each side of her laughing, shouting, and singing, the senses stricken clean out of them. ⁵¹All three of them, the dead woman and the two demented men, retained upon their faces an expression of the utmost horror—a convulsion of terror which was dreadful to look upon. ⁵²There was no sign of the presence of anyone in the house, except Mrs. Porter, the old cook and housekeeper, who declared that she had slept deeply and heard no sound during the night. ⁵³Nothing had been stolen or disarranged, and there is absolutely no explanation of what the horror can be which has frightened a woman to death and two strong men out of their senses. ⁵⁴There is the situation, Mr. Holmes, in a nutshell, and if you can help us to clear it up you will have done a great work.”

⁵⁵I had hoped that in some way I could coax my companion back into the quiet which had been the object of our journey; but one glance at his intense face and contracted eyebrows told me how vain was now the expectation. ⁵⁶He sat for some little time in silence, absorbed in the strange drama which had broken in upon our peace.

⁵⁷“I will look into this matter,” he said at last. ⁵⁸“On the face of it, it would appear to be a case of a very exceptional nature. ⁵⁹Have you been there yourself, Mr. Roundhay?”

⁶⁰“No, Mr. Holmes. ⁶¹Mr. Tregennis brought back the account to the vicarage, and I at once hurried over with him to consult you.”

⁶²“How far is it to the house where this singular tragedy occurred?”

⁶³“About a mile inland.”

⁶⁴“Then we shall walk over together. ⁶⁵But before we start I must ask you a few questions, Mr. Mortimer Tregennis.”

⁶⁶The other had been silent all this time, but I had observed that his more controlled excitement was even greater than the obtrusive emotion of the clergyman. ⁶⁷He sat with a pale, drawn face, his anxious gaze fixed upon Holmes, and his thin hands clasped convulsively together. ⁶⁸His pale lips quivered as he listened to the dreadful experience which had befallen his family, and his dark eyes seemed to reflect something of the horror of the scene.

⁶⁹“Ask what you like, Mr. Holmes,” said he eagerly. ⁷⁰“It is a bad thing to speak of, but I will answer you the truth.”

⁷¹“Tell me about last night.”

⁷²“Well, Mr. Holmes, I supped there, as the vicar has said, and my elder brother George proposed a game of whist afterwards. ⁷³We sat down about nine o'clock. ⁷⁴It was a quarter-past ten when I moved to go. ⁷⁵I left them all round the table, as merry as could be.”

⁷⁶“Who let you out?”

⁷⁷“Mrs. Porter had gone to bed, so I let myself out. ⁷⁸I shut the hall door behind me. ⁷⁹The window of the room in which they sat was closed, but the blind was not drawn down. ⁸⁰There was no change in door or window this morning, or any reason to think that any stranger had been to the house. ⁸¹Yet there they sat, driven clean mad with terror, and Brenda lying dead of fright, with her head hanging over the arm of the chair. ⁸²I'll never get the sight of that room out of my mind so long as I live.”

⁸³“The facts, as you state them, are certainly most remarkable,” said Holmes. ⁸⁴“I take it that you have no theory yourself which can in any way account for them?”

⁸⁵“It's devilish, Mr. Holmes, devilish!” cried Mortimer Tregennis. ⁸⁶“It is not of this world. ⁸⁷Something has come into that room which has dashed the light of reason from their minds. ⁸⁸What human contrivance could do that?”

⁸⁹“I fear,” said Holmes, “that if the matter is beyond humanity it is certainly beyond me. ⁹⁰Yet we must exhaust all natural explanations before we fall back upon such a theory as this. ⁹¹As to yourself, Mr. Tregennis, I take it you were divided in some way from your family, since they lived together and you had rooms apart?”

⁹²“That is so, Mr. Holmes, though the matter is past and done with. ⁹³We were a family of tin-miners at Redruth, but we sold our venture to a company, and so retired with enough to keep us. ⁹⁴I won't deny that there was some feeling about the division of the money and it stood between us for a time, but it was all forgiven and forgotten, and we were the best of friends together.”

⁹⁵“Looking back at the evening which you spent together, does anything stand out in your memory as throwing any possible light upon the tragedy? ⁹⁶Think carefully, Mr. Tregennis, for any clue which can help me.”

⁹⁷“There is nothing at all, sir.”

⁹⁸“Your people were in their usual spirits?”

⁹⁹“Never better.”

¹⁰⁰“Were they nervous people? ¹⁰¹Did they ever show any apprehension of coming danger?”

¹⁰²“Nothing of the kind.”

¹⁰³“You have nothing to add then, which could assist me?”

¹⁰⁴Mortimer Tregennis considered earnestly for a moment.

¹⁰⁵“There is one thing occurs to me,” said he at last. ¹⁰⁶“As we sat at the table my back was to the window, and my brother George, he being my partner at cards, was facing it. ¹⁰⁷I saw him once look hard over my shoulder, so I turned round and looked also. ¹⁰⁸The blind was up and the window shut, but I could just make out the bushes on the lawn, and it seemed to me for a moment that I saw something moving among them. ¹⁰⁹I couldn't even say if it was man or animal, but I just thought there was something there. ¹¹⁰When I asked him what he was looking at, he told me that he had the same feeling. ¹¹¹That is all that I can say.”

¹¹²“Did you not investigate?”

¹¹³“No; the matter passed as unimportant.”

¹¹⁴“You left them, then, without any premonition of evil?”

¹¹⁵“None at all.”

¹¹⁶“I am not clear how you came to hear the news so early this morning.”

¹¹⁷“I am an early riser and generally take a walk before breakfast. ¹¹⁸This morning I had hardly started when the doctor in his carriage overtook me. ¹¹⁹He told me that old Mrs. Porter had sent a boy down with an urgent message. ¹²⁰I sprang in beside him and we drove on. ¹²¹When we got there we looked into that dreadful room. ¹²²The candles and the fire must have burned out hours before, and they had been sitting there in the dark until dawn had broken. ¹²³The doctor said Brenda must have been dead at least six hours. ¹²⁴There were no signs of violence. ¹²⁵She just lay across the arm of the chair with that look on her face. ¹²⁶George and Owen were singing snatches of songs and gibbering like two great apes.

¹²⁷Oh, it was awful to see! ¹²⁸I couldn't stand it, and the doctor was as white as a sheet. ¹²⁹Indeed, he fell into a chair in a sort of faint, and we nearly had him on our hands as well."

¹³⁰"Remarkable—most remarkable!" said Holmes, rising and taking his hat. ¹³¹"I think, perhaps, we had better go down to Tredannick Wartha without further delay. ¹³²I confess that I have seldom known a case which at first sight presented a more singular problem."

¹³³Our proceedings of that first morning did little to advance the investigation. ¹³⁴It was marked, however, at the outset by an incident which left the most sinister impression upon my mind. ¹³⁵The approach to the spot at which the tragedy occurred is down a narrow, winding, country lane. ¹³⁶While we made our way along it we heard the rattle of a carriage coming towards us and stood aside to let it pass. ¹³⁷As it drove by us I caught a glimpse through the closed window of a horribly contorted, grinning face glaring out at us. ¹³⁸Those staring eyes and gnashing teeth flashed past us like a dreadful vision.

¹³⁹"My brothers!" cried Mortimer Tregennis, white to his lips. ¹⁴⁰"They are taking them to Helston."

¹⁴¹We looked with horror after the black carriage, lumbering upon its way. ¹⁴²Then we turned our steps towards this ill-omened house in which they had met their strange fate.

¹⁴³It was a large and bright dwelling, rather a villa than a cottage, with a considerable garden which was already, in that Cornish air, well filled with spring flowers. ¹⁴⁴Towards this garden the window of the sitting-room fronted, and from it, according to Mortimer Tregennis, must have come that thing of evil which had by sheer horror in a single instant blasted their minds. ¹⁴⁵Holmes walked slowly and thoughtfully among the flower-plots and along the path before we entered the porch. ¹⁴⁶So absorbed was he in his thoughts, I remember, that he stumbled over the watering-pot, upset its contents, and deluged both our feet and the garden path. ¹⁴⁷Inside the house we were met by the elderly Cornish housekeeper, Mrs. Porter, who, with the aid of a young girl, looked after the wants of the family. ¹⁴⁸She readily answered all Holmes's questions. ¹⁴⁹She had heard nothing in the night. ¹⁵⁰Her employers had all been in excellent spirits lately, and she had never known them more cheerful and prosperous. ¹⁵¹She had fainted with horror upon entering the room in the morning and seeing that dreadful company round the table. ¹⁵²She had, when she recovered, thrown open the window to let the morning air in, and had run down to the lane, whence she sent a farm-lad for the doctor. ¹⁵³The lady was on her bed upstairs if we cared to see her. ¹⁵⁴It took four strong men to get the brothers into the asylum carriage. ¹⁵⁵She would not herself stay in the house another day and was starting that very afternoon to rejoin her family at St. Ives.

¹⁵⁶We ascended the stairs and viewed the body. ¹⁵⁷Miss Brenda Tregennis had been a very beautiful girl, though now verging upon middle age. ¹⁵⁸Her dark, clear-cut face was handsome, even in death, but there still lingered upon it something of that convulsion of horror which had been her last human emotion. ¹⁵⁹From her bedroom we descended to the sitting-room, where this strange tragedy had actually occurred. ¹⁶⁰The charred ashes of the overnight fire lay in the grate. ¹⁶¹On the table were the four guttered and burned-out candles, with the cards scattered over its surface. ¹⁶²The chairs had been moved back against the walls, but all else was as it had been the night before. ¹⁶³Holmes paced with light, swift steps about the room; he sat in the various chairs, drawing them up and reconstructing their positions. ¹⁶⁴He tested how much of the garden was visible; he examined the floor, the ceiling, and the fireplace; but never once did I see that sudden brightening of his eyes and tightening of his lips which would have told me that he saw some gleam of light in this utter darkness.

¹⁶⁵"Why a fire?" he asked once. ¹⁶⁶"Had they always a fire in this small room on a spring evening?"

¹⁶⁷Mortimer Tregennis explained that the night was cold and damp. ¹⁶⁸For that reason, after his arrival, the fire was lit. ¹⁶⁹"What are you going to do now, Mr. Holmes?" he asked.

¹⁷⁰My friend smiled and laid his hand upon my arm. ¹⁷¹“I think, Watson, that I shall resume that course of tobacco-poisoning which you have so often and so justly condemned,” said he. ¹⁷²“With your permission, gentlemen, we will now return to our cottage, for I am not aware that any new factor is likely to come to our notice here. ¹⁷³I will turn the facts over in my mind, Mr. Tregennis, and should anything occur to me I will certainly communicate with you and the vicar. ¹⁷⁴In the meantime I wish you both good-morning.”

¹⁷⁵It was not until long after we were back in Poldhu Cottage that Holmes broke his complete and absorbed silence. ¹⁷⁶He sat coiled in his armchair, his haggard and ascetic face hardly visible amid the blue swirl of his tobacco smoke, his black brows drawn down, his forehead contracted, his eyes vacant and far away. ¹⁷⁷Finally he laid down his pipe and sprang to his feet.

¹⁷⁸“It won't do, Watson!” said he with a laugh. ¹⁷⁹“Let us walk along the cliffs together and search for flint arrows. ¹⁸⁰We are more likely to find them than clues to this problem. ¹⁸¹To let the brain work without sufficient material is like racing an engine. ¹⁸²It racks itself to pieces. ¹⁸³The sea air, sunshine, and patience, Watson—all else will come.

¹⁸⁴“Now, let us calmly define our position, Watson,” he continued as we skirted the cliffs together. ¹⁸⁵“Let us get a firm grip of the very little which we do know, so that when fresh facts arise we may be ready to fit them into their places. ¹⁸⁶I take it, in the first place, that neither of us is prepared to admit diabolical intrusions into the affairs of men. ¹⁸⁷Let us begin by ruling that entirely out of our minds. ¹⁸⁸Very good. ¹⁸⁹There remain three persons who have been grievously stricken by some conscious or unconscious human agency. ¹⁹⁰That is firm ground. ¹⁹¹Now, when did this occur? ¹⁹²Evidently, assuming his narrative to be true, it was immediately after Mr. Mortimer Tregennis had left the room. ¹⁹³That is a very important point. ¹⁹⁴The presumption is that it was within a few minutes afterwards. ¹⁹⁵The cards still lay upon the table. ¹⁹⁶It was already past their usual hour for bed. ¹⁹⁷Yet they had not changed their position or pushed back their chairs. ¹⁹⁸I repeat, then, that the occurrence was immediately after his departure, and not later than eleven o'clock last night.

¹⁹⁹“Our next obvious step is to check, so far as we can, the movements of Mortimer Tregennis after he left the room. ²⁰⁰In this there is no difficulty, and they seem to be above suspicion. ²⁰¹Knowing my methods as you do, you were, of course, conscious of the somewhat clumsy water-pot expedient by which I obtained a clearer impress of his foot than might otherwise have been possible. ²⁰²The wet, sandy path took it admirably. ²⁰³Last night was also wet, you will remember, and it was not difficult—having obtained a sample print—to pick out his track among others and to follow his movements. ²⁰⁴He appears to have walked away swiftly in the direction of the vicarage.

²⁰⁵“If, then, Mortimer Tregennis disappeared from the scene, and yet some outside person affected the card-players, how can we reconstruct that person, and how was such an impression of horror conveyed? ²⁰⁶Mrs. Porter may be eliminated. ²⁰⁷She is evidently harmless. ²⁰⁸Is there any evidence that someone crept up to the garden window and in some manner produced so terrific an effect that he drove those who saw it out of their senses? ²⁰⁹The only suggestion in this direction comes from Mortimer Tregennis himself, who says that his brother spoke about some movement in the garden. ²¹⁰That is certainly remarkable, as the night was rainy, cloudy, and dark. ²¹¹Anyone who had the design to alarm these people would be compelled to place his very face against the glass before he could be seen. ²¹²There is a three-foot flower-border outside this window, but no indication of a footmark. ²¹³It is difficult to imagine, then, how an outsider could have made so terrible an impression upon the company, nor have we found any possible motive for so strange and elaborate an attempt. ²¹⁴You perceive our difficulties, Watson?”

²¹⁵“They are only too clear,” I answered with conviction.

²¹⁶“And yet, with a little more material, we may prove that they are not insurmountable,” said Holmes.

²¹⁷“I fancy that among your extensive archives, Watson, you may find some which were nearly as

obscure. ²¹⁸Meanwhile, we shall put the case aside until more accurate data are available, and devote the rest of our morning to the pursuit of neolithic man.”

²¹⁹I may have commented upon my friend's power of mental detachment, but never have I wondered at it more than upon that spring morning in Cornwall when for two hours he discoursed upon celts, arrowheads, and shards, as lightly as if no sinister mystery were waiting for his solution. ²²⁰It was not until we had returned in the afternoon to our cottage that we found a visitor awaiting us, who soon brought our minds back to the matter in hand. ²²¹Neither of us needed to be told who that visitor was. ²²²The huge body, the craggy and deeply seamed face with the fierce eyes and hawk-like nose, the grizzled hair which nearly brushed our cottage ceiling, the beard—golden at the fringes and white near the lips, save for the nicotine stain from his perpetual cigar—all these were as well known in London as in Africa, and could only be associated with the tremendous personality of Dr. Leon Sterndale, the great lion-hunter and explorer.

²²³We had heard of his presence in the district and had once or twice caught sight of his tall figure upon the moorland paths. ²²⁴He made no advances to us, however, nor would we have dreamed of doing so to him, as it was well known that it was his love of seclusion which caused him to spend the greater part of the intervals between his journeys in a small bungalow buried in the lonely wood of Beauchamp Arriance. ²²⁵Here, amid his books and his maps, he lived an absolutely lonely life, attending to his own simple wants and paying little apparent heed to the affairs of his neighbours. ²²⁶It was a surprise to me, therefore, to hear him asking Holmes in an eager voice whether he had made any advance in his reconstruction of this mysterious episode. ²²⁷“The county police are utterly at fault,” said he, “but perhaps your wider experience has suggested some conceivable explanation. ²²⁸My only claim to being taken into your confidence is that during my many residences here I have come to know this family of Tregennis very well—indeed, upon my Cornish mother's side I could call them cousins—and their strange fate has naturally been a great shock to me. ²²⁹I may tell you that I had got as far as Plymouth upon my way to Africa, but the news reached me this morning, and I came straight back again to help in the inquiry.”

²³⁰Holmes raised his eyebrows.

²³¹“Did you lose your boat through it?”

²³²“I will take the next.”

²³³“Dear me! that is friendship indeed.”

²³⁴“I tell you they were relatives.”

²³⁵“Quite so—cousins of your mother. ²³⁶Was your baggage aboard the ship?”

²³⁷“Some of it, but the main part at the hotel.”

²³⁸“I see. ²³⁹But surely this event could not have found its way into the Plymouth morning papers.”

²⁴⁰“No, sir; I had a telegram.”

²⁴¹“Might I ask from whom?”

²⁴²A shadow passed over the gaunt face of the explorer.

²⁴³“You are very inquisitive, Mr. Holmes.”

²⁴⁴“It is my business.”

²⁴⁵With an effort Dr. Sterndale recovered his ruffled composure.

²⁴⁶“I have no objection to telling you,” he said. ²⁴⁷“It was Mr. Roundhay, the vicar, who sent me the telegram which recalled me.”

²⁴⁸“Thank you,” said Holmes. ²⁴⁹“I may say in answer to your original question that I have not cleared my mind entirely on the subject of this case, but that I have every hope of reaching some conclusion. ²⁵⁰It would be premature to say more.”

²⁵¹“Perhaps you would not mind telling me if your suspicions point in any particular direction?”

²⁵²“No, I can hardly answer that.”

²⁵³“Then I have wasted my time and need not prolong my visit.” ²⁵⁴The famous doctor strode out of our cottage in considerable ill-humour, and within five minutes Holmes had followed him. ²⁵⁵I saw him no more until the evening, when he returned with a slow step and haggard face which assured me that he had made no great progress with his investigation. ²⁵⁶He glanced at a telegram which awaited him and threw it into the grate.

²⁵⁷“From the Plymouth hotel, Watson,” he said. ²⁵⁸“I learned the name of it from the vicar, and I wired to make certain that Dr. Leon Sterndale's account was true. ²⁵⁹It appears that he did indeed spend last night there, and that he has actually allowed some of his baggage to go on to Africa, while he returned to be present at this investigation. ²⁶⁰What do you make of that, Watson?”

²⁶¹“He is deeply interested.”

²⁶²“Deeply interested—yes. ²⁶³There is a thread here which we had not yet grasped and which might lead us through the tangle. ²⁶⁴Cheer up, Watson, for I am very sure that our material has not yet all come to hand. ²⁶⁵When it does we may soon leave our difficulties behind us.”

²⁶⁶Little did I think how soon the words of Holmes would be realized, or how strange and sinister would be that new development which opened up an entirely fresh line of investigation. ²⁶⁷I was shaving at my window in the morning when I heard the rattle of hoofs and, looking up, saw a dog-cart coming at a gallop down the road. ²⁶⁸It pulled up at our door, and our friend, the vicar, sprang from it and rushed up our garden path. ²⁶⁹Holmes was already dressed, and we hastened down to meet him.

²⁷⁰Our visitor was so excited that he could hardly articulate, but at last in gasps and bursts his tragic story came out of him.

²⁷¹“We are devil-ridden, Mr. Holmes! ²⁷²My poor parish is devil-ridden!” he cried. ²⁷³“Satan himself is loose in it! ²⁷⁴We are given over into his hands!” ²⁷⁵He danced about in his agitation, a ludicrous object if it were not for his ashy face and startled eyes. ²⁷⁶Finally he shot out his terrible news.

²⁷⁷“Mr. Mortimer Tregennis died during the night, and with exactly the same symptoms as the rest of his family.”

²⁷⁸Holmes sprang to his feet, all energy in an instant.

²⁷⁹“Can you fit us both into your dog-cart?”

²⁸⁰“Yes, I can.”

²⁸¹“Then, Watson, we will postpone our breakfast. ²⁸²Mr. Roundhay, we are entirely at your disposal. ²⁸³Hurry—hurry, before things get disarranged.”

²⁸⁴The lodger occupied two rooms at the vicarage, which were in an angle by themselves, the one above the other. ²⁸⁵Below was a large sitting-room; above, his bedroom. ²⁸⁶They looked out upon a croquet lawn which came up to the windows. ²⁸⁷We had arrived before the doctor or the police, so that

everything was absolutely undisturbed. ²⁸⁸Let me describe exactly the scene as we saw it upon that misty March morning. ²⁸⁹It has left an impression which can never be effaced from my mind.

²⁹⁰The atmosphere of the room was of a horrible and depressing stuffiness. ²⁹¹The servant who had first entered had thrown up the window, or it would have been even more intolerable. ²⁹²This might partly be due to the fact that a lamp stood flaring and smoking on the centre table. ²⁹³Beside it sat the dead man, leaning back in his chair, his thin beard projecting, his spectacles pushed up on to his forehead, and his lean dark face turned towards the window and twisted into the same distortion of terror which had marked the features of his dead sister. ²⁹⁴His limbs were convulsed and his fingers contorted as though he had died in a very paroxysm of fear. ²⁹⁵He was fully clothed, though there were signs that his dressing had been done in a hurry. ²⁹⁶We had already learned that his bed had been slept in, and that the tragic end had come to him in the early morning.

²⁹⁷One realized the red-hot energy which underlay Holmes's phlegmatic exterior when one saw the sudden change which came over him from the moment that he entered the fatal apartment. ²⁹⁸In an instant he was tense and alert, his eyes shining, his face set, his limbs quivering with eager activity. ²⁹⁹He was out on the lawn, in through the window, round the room, and up into the bedroom, for all the world like a dashing foxhound drawing a cover. ³⁰⁰In the bedroom he made a rapid cast around and ended by throwing open the window, which appeared to give him some fresh cause for excitement, for he leaned out of it with loud ejaculations of interest and delight. ³⁰¹Then he rushed down the stair, out through the open window, threw himself upon his face on the lawn, sprang up and into the room once more, all with the energy of the hunter who is at the very heels of his quarry. ³⁰²The lamp, which was an ordinary standard, he examined with minute care, making certain measurements upon its bowl. ³⁰³He carefully scrutinized with his lens the talc shield which covered the top of the chimney and scraped off some ashes which adhered to its upper surface, putting some of them into an envelope, which he placed in his pocketbook. ³⁰⁴Finally, just as the doctor and the official police put in an appearance, he beckoned to the vicar and we all three went out upon the lawn.

³⁰⁵"I am glad to say that my investigation has not been entirely barren," he remarked. ³⁰⁶"I cannot remain to discuss the matter with the police, but I should be exceedingly obliged, Mr. Roundhay, if you would give the inspector my compliments and direct his attention to the bedroom window and to the sitting-room lamp. ³⁰⁷Each is suggestive, and together they are almost conclusive. ³⁰⁸If the police would desire further information I shall be happy to see any of them at the cottage. ³⁰⁹And now, Watson, I think that, perhaps, we shall be better employed elsewhere."

³¹⁰It may be that the police resented the intrusion of an amateur, or that they imagined themselves to be upon some hopeful line of investigation; but it is certain that we heard nothing from them for the next two days. ³¹¹During this time Holmes spent some of his time smoking and dreaming in the cottage; but a greater portion in country walks which he undertook alone, returning after many hours without remark as to where he had been. ³¹²One experiment served to show me the line of his investigation. ³¹³He had bought a lamp which was the duplicate of the one which had burned in the room of Mortimer Tregennis on the morning of the tragedy. ³¹⁴This he filled with the same oil as that used at the vicarage, and he carefully timed the period which it would take to be exhausted. ³¹⁵Another experiment which he made was of a more unpleasant nature, and one which I am not likely ever to forget.

³¹⁶"You will remember, Watson," he remarked one afternoon, "that there is a single common point of resemblance in the varying reports which have reached us. ³¹⁷This concerns the effect of the atmosphere of the room in each case upon those who had first entered it. ³¹⁸You will recollect that Mortimer Tregennis, in describing the episode of his last visit to his brother's house, remarked that the doctor on entering the room fell into a chair? ³¹⁹You had forgotten? ³²⁰Well I can answer for it that it was so. ³²¹Now, you will remember also that Mrs. Porter, the housekeeper, told us that she herself fainted upon entering the room and had afterwards opened the window. ³²²In the second case—that of Mortimer Tregennis himself—you cannot have forgotten the horrible stuffiness of the room when we arrived,

though the servant had thrown open the window. ³²³That servant, I found upon inquiry, was so ill that she had gone to her bed. ³²⁴You will admit, Watson, that these facts are very suggestive. ³²⁵In each case there is evidence of a poisonous atmosphere. ³²⁶In each case, also, there is combustion going on in the room—in the one case a fire, in the other a lamp. ³²⁷The fire was needed, but the lamp was lit—as a comparison of the oil consumed will show—long after it was broad daylight. ³²⁸Why? ³²⁹Surely because there is some connection between three things—the burning, the stuffy atmosphere, and, finally, the madness or death of those unfortunate people. ³³⁰That is clear, is it not?”

³³¹“It would appear so.”

³³²“At least we may accept it as a working hypothesis. ³³³We will suppose, then, that something was burned in each case which produced an atmosphere causing strange toxic effects. ³³⁴Very good. ³³⁵In the first instance—that of the Tregennis family—this substance was placed in the fire. ³³⁶Now the window was shut, but the fire would naturally carry fumes to some extent up the chimney. ³³⁷Hence one would expect the effects of the poison to be less than in the second case, where there was less escape for the vapour. ³³⁸The result seems to indicate that it was so, since in the first case only the woman, who had presumably the more sensitive organism, was killed, the others exhibiting that temporary or permanent lunacy which is evidently the first effect of the drug. ³³⁹In the second case the result was complete. ³⁴⁰The facts, therefore, seem to bear out the theory of a poison which worked by combustion.

³⁴¹“With this train of reasoning in my head I naturally looked about in Mortimer Tregennis's room to find some remains of this substance. ³⁴²The obvious place to look was the talc shelf or smoke-guard of the lamp. ³⁴³There, sure enough, I perceived a number of flaky ashes, and round the edges a fringe of brownish powder, which had not yet been consumed. ³⁴⁴Half of this I took, as you saw, and I placed it in an envelope.”

³⁴⁵“Why half, Holmes?”

³⁴⁶“It is not for me, my dear Watson, to stand in the way of the official police force. ³⁴⁷I leave them all the evidence which I found. ³⁴⁸The poison still remained upon the talc had they the wit to find it. ³⁴⁹Now, Watson, we will light our lamp; we will, however, take the precaution to open our window to avoid the premature decease of two deserving members of society, and you will seat yourself near that open window in an armchair unless, like a sensible man, you determine to have nothing to do with the affair. ³⁵⁰Oh, you will see it out, will you? ³⁵¹I thought I knew my Watson. ³⁵²This chair I will place opposite yours, so that we may be the same distance from the poison and face to face. ³⁵³The door we will leave ajar. ³⁵⁴Each is now in a position to watch the other and to bring the experiment to an end should the symptoms seem alarming. ³⁵⁵Is that all clear? ³⁵⁶Well, then, I take our powder—or what remains of it—from the envelope, and I lay it above the burning lamp. ³⁵⁷So! ³⁵⁸Now, Watson, let us sit down and await developments.”

³⁵⁹They were not long in coming. ³⁶⁰I had hardly settled in my chair before I was conscious of a thick, musky odour, subtle and nauseous. ³⁶¹At the very first whiff of it my brain and my imagination were beyond all control. ³⁶²A thick, black cloud swirled before my eyes, and my mind told me that in this cloud, unseen as yet, but about to spring out upon my appalled senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in the universe. ³⁶³Vague shapes swirled and swam amid the dark cloud-bank, each a menace and a warning of something coming, the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold, whose very shadow would blast my soul. ³⁶⁴A freezing horror took possession of me. ³⁶⁵I felt that my hair was rising, that my eyes were protruding, that my mouth was opened, and my tongue like leather. ³⁶⁶The turmoil within my brain was such that something must surely snap. ³⁶⁷I tried to scream and was vaguely aware of some hoarse croak which was my own voice, but distant and detached from myself. ³⁶⁸At the same moment, in some effort of escape, I broke through that cloud of despair and had a glimpse of Holmes's face, white, rigid, and drawn with horror—the very look which I had seen upon the features of the dead. ³⁶⁹It was that vision which gave me an

instant of sanity and of strength. ³⁷⁰I dashed from my chair, threw my arms round Holmes, and together we lurched through the door, and an instant afterwards had thrown ourselves down upon the grass plot and were lying side by side, conscious only of the glorious sunshine which was bursting its way through the hellish cloud of terror which had girt us in. ³⁷¹Slowly it rose from our souls like the mists from a landscape until peace and reason had returned, and we were sitting upon the grass, wiping our clammy foreheads, and looking with apprehension at each other to mark the last traces of that terrific experience which we had undergone.

³⁷²“Upon my word, Watson!” said Holmes at last with an unsteady voice, “I owe you both my thanks and an apology. ³⁷³It was an unjustifiable experiment even for one's self, and doubly so for a friend. ³⁷⁴I am really very sorry.”

³⁷⁵“You know,” I answered with some emotion, for I have never seen so much of Holmes's heart before, “that it is my greatest joy and privilege to help you.”

³⁷⁶He relapsed at once into the half-humorous, half-cynical vein which was his habitual attitude to those about him. ³⁷⁷“It would be superfluous to drive us mad, my dear Watson,” said he. ³⁷⁸“A candid observer would certainly declare that we were so already before we embarked upon so wild an experiment. ³⁷⁹I confess that I never imagined that the effect could be so sudden and so severe.” ³⁸⁰He dashed into the cottage, and, reappearing with the burning lamp held at full arm's length, he threw it among a bank of brambles. ³⁸¹“We must give the room a little time to clear. ³⁸²I take it, Watson, that you have no longer a shadow of a doubt as to how these tragedies were produced?”

³⁸³“None whatever.”

³⁸⁴“But the cause remains as obscure as before. ³⁸⁵Come into the arbour here and let us discuss it together. ³⁸⁶That villainous stuff seems still to linger round my throat. ³⁸⁷I think we must admit that all the evidence points to this man, Mortimer Tregennis, having been the criminal in the first tragedy, though he was the victim in the second one. ³⁸⁸We must remember, in the first place, that there is some story of a family quarrel, followed by a reconciliation. ³⁸⁹How bitter that quarrel may have been, or how hollow the reconciliation we cannot tell. ³⁹⁰When I think of Mortimer Tregennis, with the foxy face and the small shrewd, beady eyes behind the spectacles, he is not a man whom I should judge to be of a particularly forgiving disposition. ³⁹¹Well, in the next place, you will remember that this idea of someone moving in the garden, which took our attention for a moment from the real cause of the tragedy, emanated from him. ³⁹²He had a motive in misleading us. ³⁹³Finally, if he did not throw the substance into the fire at the moment of leaving the room, who did do so? ³⁹⁴The affair happened immediately after his departure. ³⁹⁵Had anyone else come in, the family would certainly have risen from the table. ³⁹⁶Besides, in peaceful Cornwall, visitors did not arrive after ten o'clock at night. ³⁹⁷We may take it, then, that all the evidence points to Mortimer Tregennis as the culprit.”

³⁹⁸“Then his own death was suicide!”

³⁹⁹“Well, Watson, it is on the face of it a not impossible supposition. ⁴⁰⁰The man who had the guilt upon his soul of having brought such a fate upon his own family might well be driven by remorse to inflict it upon himself. ⁴⁰¹There are, however, some cogent reasons against it. ⁴⁰²Fortunately, there is one man in England who knows all about it, and I have made arrangements by which we shall hear the facts this afternoon from his own lips. ⁴⁰³Ah! he is a little before his time. ⁴⁰⁴Perhaps you would kindly step this way, Dr. Leon Sterndale. ⁴⁰⁵We have been conducting a chemical experiment indoors which has left our little room hardly fit for the reception of so distinguished a visitor.”

⁴⁰⁶I had heard the click of the garden gate, and now the majestic figure of the great African explorer appeared upon the path. ⁴⁰⁷He turned in some surprise towards the rustic arbour in which we sat.

⁴⁰⁸“You sent for me, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁰⁹I had your note about an hour ago, and I have come, though I really do not know why I should obey your summons.”

⁴¹⁰“Perhaps we can clear the point up before we separate,” said Holmes. ⁴¹¹“Meanwhile, I am much obliged to you for your courteous acquiescence. ⁴¹²You will excuse this informal reception in the open air, but my friend Watson and I have nearly furnished an additional chapter to what the papers call the Cornish Horror, and we prefer a clear atmosphere for the present. ⁴¹³Perhaps, since the matters which we have to discuss will affect you personally in a very intimate fashion, it is as well that we should talk where there can be no eavesdropping.”

⁴¹⁴The explorer took his cigar from his lips and gazed sternly at my companion.

⁴¹⁵“I am at a loss to know, sir,” he said, “what you can have to speak about which affects me personally in a very intimate fashion.”

⁴¹⁶“The killing of Mortimer Tregennis,” said Holmes.

⁴¹⁷For a moment I wished that I were armed. ⁴¹⁸Sterndale's fierce face turned to a dusky red, his eyes glared, and the knotted, passionate veins started out in his forehead, while he sprang forward with clenched hands towards my companion. ⁴¹⁹Then he stopped, and with a violent effort he resumed a cold, rigid calmness, which was, perhaps, more suggestive of danger than his hot-headed outburst.

⁴²⁰“I have lived so long among savages and beyond the law,” said he, “that I have got into the way of being a law to myself. ⁴²¹You would do well, Mr. Holmes, not to forget it, for I have no desire to do you an injury.”

⁴²²“Nor have I any desire to do you an injury, Dr. Sterndale. ⁴²³Surely the clearest proof of it is that, knowing what I know, I have sent for you and not for the police.”

⁴²⁴Sterndale sat down with a gasp, overawed for, perhaps, the first time in his adventurous life. ⁴²⁵There was a calm assurance of power in Holmes's manner which could not be withstood. ⁴²⁶Our visitor stammered for a moment, his great hands opening and shutting in his agitation.

⁴²⁷“What do you mean?” he asked at last. ⁴²⁸“If this is bluff upon your part, Mr. Holmes, you have chosen a bad man for your experiment. ⁴²⁹Let us have no more beating about the bush. ⁴³⁰What do you mean?”

⁴³¹“I will tell you,” said Holmes, “and the reason why I tell you is that I hope frankness may beget frankness. ⁴³²What my next step may be will depend entirely upon the nature of your own defence.”

⁴³³“My defence?”

⁴³⁴“Yes, sir.”

⁴³⁵“My defence against what?”

⁴³⁶“Against the charge of killing Mortimer Tregennis.”

⁴³⁷Sterndale mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. ⁴³⁸“Upon my word, you are getting on,” said he. ⁴³⁹“Do all your successes depend upon this prodigious power of bluff?”

⁴⁴⁰“The bluff,” said Holmes sternly, “is upon your side, Dr. Leon Sterndale, and not upon mine. ⁴⁴¹As a proof I will tell you some of the facts upon which my conclusions are based. ⁴⁴²Of your return from Plymouth, allowing much of your property to go on to Africa, I will say nothing save that it first informed me that you were one of the factors which had to be taken into account in reconstructing this drama—”

⁴⁴³“I came back—”

⁴⁴⁴“I have heard your reasons and regard them as unconvincing and inadequate. ⁴⁴⁵We will pass that. ⁴⁴⁶You came down here to ask me whom I suspected. ⁴⁴⁷I refused to answer you. ⁴⁴⁸You then went to the vicarage, waited outside it for some time, and finally returned to your cottage.”

⁴⁴⁹“How do you know that?”

⁴⁵⁰“I followed you.”

⁴⁵¹“I saw no one.”

⁴⁵²“That is what you may expect to see when I follow you. ⁴⁵³You spent a restless night at your cottage, and you formed certain plans, which in the early morning you proceeded to put into execution. ⁴⁵⁴Leaving your door just as day was breaking, you filled your pocket with some reddish gravel that was lying heaped beside your gate.”

⁴⁵⁵Sterndale gave a violent start and looked at Holmes in amazement.

⁴⁵⁶“You then walked swiftly for the mile which separated you from the vicarage. ⁴⁵⁷You were wearing, I may remark, the same pair of ribbed tennis shoes which are at the present moment upon your feet. ⁴⁵⁸At the vicarage you passed through the orchard and the side hedge, coming out under the window of the lodger Tregennis. ⁴⁵⁹It was now daylight, but the household was not yet stirring. ⁴⁶⁰You drew some of the gravel from your pocket, and you threw it up at the window above you.”

⁴⁶¹Sterndale sprang to his feet.

⁴⁶²“I believe that you are the devil himself!” he cried.

⁴⁶³Holmes smiled at the compliment. ⁴⁶⁴“It took two, or possibly three, handfuls before the lodger came to the window. ⁴⁶⁵You beckoned him to come down. ⁴⁶⁶He dressed hurriedly and descended to his sitting-room. ⁴⁶⁷You entered by the window. ⁴⁶⁸There was an interview—a short one—during which you walked up and down the room. ⁴⁶⁹Then you passed out and closed the window, standing on the lawn outside smoking a cigar and watching what occurred. ⁴⁷⁰Finally, after the death of Tregennis, you withdrew as you had come. ⁴⁷¹Now, Dr. Sterndale, how do you justify such conduct, and what were the motives for your actions? ⁴⁷²If you prevaricate or trifle with me, I give you my assurance that the matter will pass out of my hands forever.”

⁴⁷³Our visitor's face had turned ashen gray as he listened to the words of his accuser. ⁴⁷⁴Now he sat for some time in thought with his face sunk in his hands. ⁴⁷⁵Then with a sudden impulsive gesture he plucked a photograph from his breast-pocket and threw it on the rustic table before us.

⁴⁷⁶“That is why I have done it,” said he.

⁴⁷⁷It showed the bust and face of a very beautiful woman. ⁴⁷⁸Holmes stooped over it.

⁴⁷⁹“Brenda Tregennis,” said he.

⁴⁸⁰“Yes, Brenda Tregennis,” repeated our visitor. ⁴⁸¹“For years I have loved her. ⁴⁸²For years she has loved me. ⁴⁸³There is the secret of that Cornish seclusion which people have marvelled at. ⁴⁸⁴It has brought me close to the one thing on earth that was dear to me. ⁴⁸⁵I could not marry her, for I have a wife who has left me for years and yet whom, by the deplorable laws of England, I could not divorce. ⁴⁸⁶For years Brenda waited. ⁴⁸⁷For years I waited. ⁴⁸⁸And this is what we have waited for.” ⁴⁸⁹A terrible sob shook his great frame, and he clutched his throat under his brindled beard. ⁴⁹⁰Then with an effort he mastered himself and spoke on:

⁴⁹¹“The vicar knew. ⁴⁹²He was in our confidence. ⁴⁹³He would tell you that she was an angel upon earth. ⁴⁹⁴That was why he telegraphed to me and I returned. ⁴⁹⁵What was my baggage or Africa to me when I

learned that such a fate had come upon my darling? ⁴⁹⁶There you have the missing clue to my action, Mr. Holmes."

⁴⁹⁷"Proceed," said my friend.

⁴⁹⁸Dr. Sterndale drew from his pocket a paper packet and laid it upon the table. ⁴⁹⁹On the outside was written "Radix pedis diaboli" with a red poison label beneath it. ⁵⁰⁰He pushed it towards me. ⁵⁰¹"I understand that you are a doctor, sir. ⁵⁰²Have you ever heard of this preparation?"

⁵⁰³"Devil's-foot root! ⁵⁰⁴No, I have never heard of it."

⁵⁰⁵"It is no reflection upon your professional knowledge," said he, "for I believe that, save for one sample in a laboratory at Buda, there is no other specimen in Europe. ⁵⁰⁶It has not yet found its way either into the pharmacopoeia or into the literature of toxicology. ⁵⁰⁷The root is shaped like a foot, half human, half goatlike; hence the fanciful name given by a botanical missionary. ⁵⁰⁸It is used as an ordeal poison by the medicine-men in certain districts of West Africa and is kept as a secret among them. ⁵⁰⁹This particular specimen I obtained under very extraordinary circumstances in the Ubangi country." ⁵¹⁰He opened the paper as he spoke and disclosed a heap of reddish-brown, snuff-like powder.

⁵¹¹"Well, sir?" asked Holmes sternly.

⁵¹²"I am about to tell you, Mr. Holmes, all that actually occurred, for you already know so much that it is clearly to my interest that you should know all. ⁵¹³I have already explained the relationship in which I stood to the Tregennis family. ⁵¹⁴For the sake of the sister I was friendly with the brothers. ⁵¹⁵There was a family quarrel about money which estranged this man Mortimer, but it was supposed to be made up, and I afterwards met him as I did the others. ⁵¹⁶He was a sly, subtle, scheming man, and several things arose which gave me a suspicion of him, but I had no cause for any positive quarrel.

⁵¹⁷"One day, only a couple of weeks ago, he came down to my cottage and I showed him some of my African curiosities. ⁵¹⁸Among other things I exhibited this powder, and I told him of its strange properties, how it stimulates those brain centres which control the emotion of fear, and how either madness or death is the fate of the unhappy native who is subjected to the ordeal by the priest of his tribe. ⁵¹⁹I told him also how powerless European science would be to detect it. ⁵²⁰How he took it I cannot say, for I never left the room, but there is no doubt that it was then, while I was opening cabinets and stooping to boxes, that he managed to abstract some of the devil's-foot root. ⁵²¹I well remember how he plied me with questions as to the amount and the time that was needed for its effect, but I little dreamed that he could have a personal reason for asking.

⁵²²"I thought no more of the matter until the vicar's telegram reached me at Plymouth. ⁵²³This villain had thought that I would be at sea before the news could reach me, and that I should be lost for years in Africa. ⁵²⁴But I returned at once. ⁵²⁵Of course, I could not listen to the details without feeling assured that my poison had been used. ⁵²⁶I came round to see you on the chance that some other explanation had suggested itself to you. ⁵²⁷But there could be none. ⁵²⁸I was convinced that Mortimer Tregennis was the murderer; that for the sake of money, and with the idea, perhaps, that if the other members of his family were all insane he would be the sole guardian of their joint property, he had used the devil's-foot powder upon them, driven two of them out of their senses, and killed his sister Brenda, the one human being whom I have ever loved or who has ever loved me. ⁵²⁹There was his crime; what was to be his punishment?

⁵³⁰"Should I appeal to the law? ⁵³¹Where were my proofs? ⁵³²I knew that the facts were true, but could I help to make a jury of countrymen believe so fantastic a story? ⁵³³I might or I might not. ⁵³⁴But I could not afford to fail. ⁵³⁵My soul cried out for revenge. ⁵³⁶I have said to you once before, Mr. Holmes, that I have spent much of my life outside the law, and that I have come at last to be a law to myself. ⁵³⁷So it was even now. ⁵³⁸I determined that the fate which he had given to others should be shared by himself.

⁵³⁹Either that or I would do justice upon him with my own hand. ⁵⁴⁰In all England there can be no man who sets less value upon his own life than I do at the present moment.

⁵⁴¹“Now I have told you all. ⁵⁴²You have yourself supplied the rest. ⁵⁴³I did, as you say, after a restless night, set off early from my cottage. ⁵⁴⁴I foresaw the difficulty of arousing him, so I gathered some gravel from the pile which you have mentioned, and I used it to throw up to his window. ⁵⁴⁵He came down and admitted me through the window of the sitting-room. ⁵⁴⁶I laid his offence before him. ⁵⁴⁷I told him that I had come both as judge and executioner. ⁵⁴⁸The wretch sank into a chair, paralyzed at the sight of my revolver. ⁵⁴⁹I lit the lamp, put the powder above it, and stood outside the window, ready to carry out my threat to shoot him should he try to leave the room. ⁵⁵⁰In five minutes he died. ⁵⁵¹My God! how he died! ⁵⁵²But my heart was flint, for he endured nothing which my innocent darling had not felt before him. ⁵⁵³There is my story, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁵⁴Perhaps, if you loved a woman, you would have done as much yourself. ⁵⁵⁵At any rate, I am in your hands. ⁵⁵⁶You can take what steps you like. ⁵⁵⁷As I have already said, there is no man living who can fear death less than I do.”

⁵⁵⁸Holmes sat for some little time in silence.

⁵⁵⁹“What were your plans?” he asked at last.

⁵⁶⁰“I had intended to bury myself in central Africa. ⁵⁶¹My work there is but half finished.”

⁵⁶²“Go and do the other half,” said Holmes. ⁵⁶³“I, at least, am not prepared to prevent you.”

⁵⁶⁴Dr. Sterndale raised his giant figure, bowed gravely, and walked from the harbour. ⁵⁶⁵Holmes lit his pipe and handed me his pouch.

⁵⁶⁶“Some fumes which are not poisonous would be a welcome change,” said he. ⁵⁶⁷“I think you must agree, Watson, that it is not a case in which we are called upon to interfere. ⁵⁶⁸Our investigation has been independent, and our action shall be so also. ⁵⁶⁹You would not denounce the man?”

⁵⁷⁰“Certainly not,” I answered.

⁵⁷¹“I have never loved, Watson, but if I did and if the woman I loved had met such an end, I might act even as our lawless lion-hunter has done. ⁵⁷²Who knows? ⁵⁷³Well, Watson, I will not offend your intelligence by explaining what is obvious. ⁵⁷⁴The gravel upon the window-sill was, of course, the starting-point of my research. ⁵⁷⁵It was unlike anything in the vicarage garden. ⁵⁷⁶Only when my attention had been drawn to Dr. Sterndale and his cottage did I find its counterpart. ⁵⁷⁷The lamp shining in broad daylight and the remains of powder upon the shield were successive links in a fairly obvious chain. ⁵⁷⁸And now, my dear Watson, I think we may dismiss the matter from our mind and go back with a clear conscience to the study of those Chaldean roots which are surely to be traced in the Cornish branch of the great Celtic speech.”

His Last Bow

¹It was nine o'clock at night upon the second of August—the most terrible August in the history of the world. ²One might have thought already that God's curse hung heavy over a degenerate world, for there was an awesome hush and a feeling of vague expectancy in the sultry and stagnant air. ³The sun had long set, but one blood-red gash like an open wound lay low in the distant west. ⁴Above, the stars were shining brightly, and below, the lights of the shipping glimmered in the bay. ⁵The two famous Germans stood beside the stone parapet of the garden walk, with the long, low, heavily gabled house behind them, and they looked down upon the broad sweep of the beach at the foot of the great chalk cliff in which Von Bork, like some wandering eagle, had perched himself four years before. ⁶They stood with their heads close together, talking in low, confidential tones. ⁷From below the two glowing ends of their cigars might have been the smouldering eyes of some malignant fiend looking down in the darkness.

⁸A remarkable man this Von Bork—a man who could hardly be matched among all the devoted agents of the Kaiser. ⁹It was his talents which had first recommended him for the English mission, the most important mission of all, but since he had taken it over those talents had become more and more manifest to the half-dozen people in the world who were really in touch with the truth. ¹⁰One of these was his present companion, Baron Von Herling, the chief secretary of the legation, whose huge 100-horse-power Benz car was blocking the country lane as it waited to waft its owner back to London.

¹¹“So far as I can judge the trend of events, you will probably be back in Berlin within the week,” the secretary was saying. ¹²“When you get there, my dear Von Bork, I think you will be surprised at the welcome you will receive. ¹³I happen to know what is thought in the highest quarters of your work in this country.” ¹⁴He was a huge man, the secretary, deep, broad, and tall, with a slow, heavy fashion of speech which had been his main asset in his political career.

¹⁵Von Bork laughed.

¹⁶“They are not very hard to deceive,” he remarked. ¹⁷“A more docile, simple folk could not be imagined.”

¹⁸“I don't know about that,” said the other thoughtfully. ¹⁹“They have strange limits and one must learn to observe them. ²⁰It is that surface simplicity of theirs which makes a trap for the stranger. ²¹One's first impression is that they are entirely soft. ²²Then one comes suddenly upon something very hard, and you know that you have reached the limit and must adapt yourself to the fact. ²³They have, for example, their insular conventions which simply must be observed.”

²⁴“Meaning ‘good form’ and that sort of thing?” Von Bork sighed as one who had suffered much.

²⁵“Meaning British prejudice in all its queer manifestations. ²⁶As an example I may quote one of my own worst blunders—I can afford to talk of my blunders, for you know my work well enough to be aware of my successes. ²⁷It was on my first arrival. ²⁸I was invited to a week-end gathering at the country house of a cabinet minister. ²⁹The conversation was amazingly indiscreet.”

³⁰Von Bork nodded. ³¹“I've been there,” said he dryly.

³²“Exactly. ³³Well, I naturally sent a resume of the information to Berlin. ³⁴Unfortunately our good chancellor is a little heavy-handed in these matters, and he transmitted a remark which showed that he was aware of what had been said. ³⁵This, of course, took the trail straight up to me. ³⁶You've no idea the harm that it did me. ³⁷There was nothing soft about our British hosts on that occasion, I can assure you. ³⁸I was two years living it down. ³⁹Now you, with this sporting pose of yours—”

⁴⁰“No, no, don't call it a pose. ⁴¹A pose is an artificial thing. ⁴²This is quite natural. ⁴³I am a born sportsman. ⁴⁴I enjoy it.”

⁴⁵“Well, that makes it the more effective. ⁴⁶You yacht against them, you hunt with them, you play polo, you match them in every game, your four-in-hand takes the prize at Olympia. ⁴⁷I have even heard that you go the length of boxing with the young officers. ⁴⁸What is the result? ⁴⁹Nobody takes you seriously. ⁵⁰You are a ‘good old sport,’ ‘quite a decent fellow for a German,’ a hard-drinking, night-club, knock-about-town, devil-may-care young fellow. ⁵¹And all the time this quiet country house of yours is the centre of half the mischief in England, and the sporting squire the most astute secret-service man in Europe. ⁵²Genius, my dear Von Bork—genius!”

⁵³“You flatter me, Baron. ⁵⁴But certainly I may claim my four years in this country have not been unproductive. ⁵⁵I've never shown you my little store. ⁵⁶Would you mind stepping in for a moment?”

⁵⁷The door of the study opened straight on to the terrace. ⁵⁸Von Bork pushed it back, and, leading the way, he clicked the switch of the electric light. ⁵⁹He then closed the door behind the bulky form which followed him and carefully adjusted the heavy curtain over the latticed window. ⁶⁰Only when all these precautions had been taken and tested did he turn his sunburned aquiline face to his guest.

⁶¹“Some of my papers have gone,” said he. ⁶²“When my wife and the household left yesterday for Flushing they took the less important with them. ⁶³I must, of course, claim the protection of the embassy for the others.”

⁶⁴“Your name has already been filed as one of the personal suite. ⁶⁵There will be no difficulties for you or your baggage. ⁶⁶Of course, it is just possible that we may not have to go. ⁶⁷England may leave France to her fate. ⁶⁸We are sure that there is no binding treaty between them.”

⁶⁹“And Belgium?”

⁷⁰“Yes, and Belgium, too.”

⁷¹Von Bork shook his head. ⁷²“I don't see how that could be. ⁷³There is a definite treaty there. ⁷⁴She could never recover from such a humiliation.”

⁷⁵“She would at least have peace for the moment.”

⁷⁶“But her honor?”

⁷⁷“Tut, my dear sir, we live in a utilitarian age. ⁷⁸Honour is a mediaeval conception. ⁷⁹Besides England is not ready. ⁸⁰It is an inconceivable thing, but even our special war tax of fifty million, which one would think made our purpose as clear as if we had advertised it on the front page of the Times, has not roused these people from their slumbers. ⁸¹Here and there one hears a question. ⁸²It is my business to find an answer. ⁸³Here and there also there is an irritation. ⁸⁴It is my business to soothe it. ⁸⁵But I can assure you that so far as the essentials go—the storage of munitions, the preparation for submarine attack, the arrangements for making high explosives—nothing is prepared. ⁸⁶How, then, can England come in, especially when we have stirred her up such a devil's brew of Irish civil war, window-breaking Furies, and God knows what to keep her thoughts at home.”

⁸⁷“She must think of her future.”

⁸⁸“Ah, that is another matter. ⁸⁹I fancy that in the future we have our own very definite plans about England, and that your information will be very vital to us. ⁹⁰It is to-day or to-morrow with Mr. John Bull. ⁹¹If he prefers to-day we are perfectly ready. ⁹²If it is to-morrow we shall be more ready still. ⁹³I should think they would be wiser to fight with allies than without them, but that is their own affair. ⁹⁴This week is their week of destiny. ⁹⁵But you were speaking of your papers.” ⁹⁶He sat in the armchair with the light shining upon his broad bald head, while he puffed sedately at his cigar.

⁹⁷The large oak-panelled, book-lined room had a curtain hung in the future corner. ⁹⁸When this was drawn it disclosed a large, brass-bound safe. ⁹⁹Von Bork detached a small key from his watch chain, and after some considerable manipulation of the lock he swung open the heavy door.

¹⁰⁰"Look!" said he, standing clear, with a wave of his hand.

¹⁰¹The light shone vividly into the opened safe, and the secretary of the embassy gazed with an absorbed interest at the rows of stuffed pigeon-holes with which it was furnished. ¹⁰²Each pigeon-hole had its label, and his eyes as he glanced along them read a long series of such titles as "Fords," "Harbour-defences," "Aeroplanes," "Ireland," "Egypt," "Portsmouth forts," "The Channel," "Rosythe," and a score of others. ¹⁰³Each compartment was bristling with papers and plans.

¹⁰⁴"Colossal!" said the secretary. ¹⁰⁵Putting down his cigar he softly clapped his fat hands.

¹⁰⁶"And all in four years, Baron. ¹⁰⁷Not such a bad show for the hard-drinking, hard-riding country squire. ¹⁰⁸But the gem of my collection is coming and there is the setting all ready for it." ¹⁰⁹He pointed to a space over which "Naval Signals" was printed.

¹¹⁰"But you have a good dossier there already."

¹¹¹"Out of date and waste paper. ¹¹²The Admiralty in some way got the alarm and every code has been changed. ¹¹³It was a blow, Baron—the worst setback in my whole campaign. ¹¹⁴But thanks to my check-book and the good Altamont all will be well to-night."

¹¹⁵The Baron looked at his watch and gave a guttural exclamation of disappointment.

¹¹⁶"Well, I really can wait no longer. ¹¹⁷You can imagine that things are moving at present in Carlton Terrace and that we have all to be at our posts. ¹¹⁸I had hoped to be able to bring news of your great coup. ¹¹⁹Did Altamont name no hour?"

¹²⁰Von Bork pushed over a telegram.

¹²¹Will come without fail to-night and bring new sparking plugs.

¹²²— —Altamont.

¹²³"Sparking plugs, eh?"

¹²⁴"You see he poses as a motor expert and I keep a full garage. ¹²⁵In our code everything likely to come up is named after some spare part. ¹²⁶If he talks of a radiator it is a battleship, of an oil pump a cruiser, and so on. ¹²⁷Sparking plugs are naval signals."

¹²⁸"From Portsmouth at midday," said the secretary, examining the superscription. ¹²⁹"By the way, what do you give him?"

¹³⁰"Five hundred pounds for this particular job. ¹³¹Of course he has a salary as well."

¹³²"The greedy rouge. ¹³³They are useful, these traitors, but I grudge them their blood money."

¹³⁴"I grudge Altamont nothing. ¹³⁵He is a wonderful worker. ¹³⁶If I pay him well, at least he delivers the goods, to use his own phrase. ¹³⁷Besides he is not a traitor. ¹³⁸I assure you that our most pan-Germanic Junker is a sucking dove in his feelings towards England as compared with a real bitter Irish-American."

¹³⁹"Oh, an Irish-American?"

¹⁴⁰"If you heard him talk you would not doubt it. ¹⁴¹Sometimes I assure you I can hardly understand him. ¹⁴²He seems to have declared war on the King's English as well as on the English king. ¹⁴³Must you really go? ¹⁴⁴He may be here any moment."

¹⁴⁵“No. ¹⁴⁶I'm sorry, but I have already overstayed my time. ¹⁴⁷We shall expect you early to-morrow, and when you get that signal book through the little door on the Duke of York's steps you can put a triumphant finis to your record in England. ¹⁴⁸What! ¹⁴⁹Tokay!” ¹⁵⁰He indicated a heavily sealed dust-covered bottle which stood with two high glasses upon a salver.

¹⁵¹“May I offer you a glass before your journey?”

¹⁵²“No, thanks. ¹⁵³But it looks like revelry.”

¹⁵⁴“Altamont has a nice taste in wines, and he took a fancy to my Tokay. ¹⁵⁵He is a touchy fellow and needs humouring in small things. ¹⁵⁶I have to study him, I assure you.” ¹⁵⁷They had strolled out on to the terrace again, and along it to the further end where at a touch from the Baron's chauffeur the great car shivered and chuckled. ¹⁵⁸“Those are the lights of Harwich, I suppose,” said the secretary, pulling on his dust coat. ¹⁵⁹“How still and peaceful it all seems. ¹⁶⁰There may be other lights within the week, and the English coast a less tranquil place! ¹⁶¹The heavens, too, may not be quite so peaceful if all that the good Zeppelin promises us comes true. ¹⁶²By the way, who is that?”

¹⁶³Only one window showed a light behind them; in it there stood a lamp, and beside it, seated at a table, was a dear old ruddy-faced woman in a country cap. ¹⁶⁴She was bending over her knitting and stopping occasionally to stroke a large black cat upon a stool beside her.

¹⁶⁵“That is Martha, the only servant I have left.”

¹⁶⁶The secretary chuckled.

¹⁶⁷“She might almost personify Britannia,” said he, “with her complete self-absorption and general air of comfortable somnolence. ¹⁶⁸Well, au revoir, Von Bork!” ¹⁶⁹With a final wave of his hand he sprang into the car, and a moment later the two golden cones from the headlights shot through the darkness. ¹⁷⁰The secretary lay back in the cushions of the luxurious limousine, with his thoughts so full of the impending European tragedy that he hardly observed that as his car swung round the village street it nearly passed over a little Ford coming in the opposite direction.

¹⁷¹Von Bork walked slowly back to the study when the last gleams of the motor lamps had faded into the distance. ¹⁷²As he passed he observed that his old housekeeper had put out her lamp and retired. ¹⁷³It was a new experience to him, the silence and darkness of his widespread house, for his family and household had been a large one. ¹⁷⁴It was a relief to him, however, to think that they were all in safety and that, but for that one old woman who had lingered in the kitchen, he had the whole place to himself. ¹⁷⁵There was a good deal of tidying up to do inside his study and he set himself to do it until his keen, handsome face was flushed with the heat of the burning papers. ¹⁷⁶A leather valise stood beside his table, and into this he began to pack very neatly and systematically the precious contents of his safe. ¹⁷⁷He had hardly got started with the work, however, when his quick ears caught the sounds of a distant car. ¹⁷⁸Instantly he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, strapped up the valise, shut the safe, locked it, and hurried out on to the terrace. ¹⁷⁹He was just in time to see the lights of a small car come to a halt at the gate. ¹⁸⁰A passenger sprang out of it and advanced swiftly towards him, while the chauffeur, a heavily built, elderly man with a gray moustache, settled down like one who resigns himself to a long vigil.

¹⁸¹“Well?” asked Von Bork eagerly, running forward to meet his visitor.

¹⁸²For answer the man waved a small brown-paper parcel triumphantly above his head.

¹⁸³“You can give me the glad hand to-night, mister,” he cried. ¹⁸⁴“I'm bringing home the bacon at last.”

¹⁸⁵“The signals?”

¹⁸⁶“Same as I said in my cable. ¹⁸⁷Every last one of them, semaphore, lamp code, Marconi—a copy, mind you, not the original. ¹⁸⁸That was too dangerous. ¹⁸⁹But it's the real goods, and you can lay to that.”
¹⁹⁰He slapped the German upon the shoulder with a rough familiarity from which the other winced.

¹⁹¹“Come in,” he said. ¹⁹²“I'm all alone in the house. ¹⁹³I was only waiting for this. ¹⁹⁴Of course a copy is better than the original. ¹⁹⁵If an original were missing they would change the whole thing. ¹⁹⁶You think it's all safe about the copy?”

¹⁹⁷The Irish-American had entered the study and stretched his long limbs from the armchair. ¹⁹⁸He was a tall, gaunt man of sixty, with clear-cut features and a small goatee beard which gave him a general resemblance to the caricatures of Uncle Sam. ¹⁹⁹A half-smoked, sodden cigar hung from the corner of his mouth, and as he sat down he struck a match and relit it. ²⁰⁰“Making ready for a move?” he remarked as he looked round him. ²⁰¹“Say, mister,” he added, as his eyes fell upon the safe from which the curtain was now removed, “you don't tell me you keep your papers in that?”

²⁰²“Why not?”

²⁰³“Gosh, in a wide-open contraption like that! ²⁰⁴And they reckon you to be some spy. ²⁰⁵Why, a Yankee crook would be into that with a can-opener. ²⁰⁶If I'd known that any letter of mine was goin' to lie loose in a thing like that I'd have been a mug to write to you at all.”

²⁰⁷“It would puzzle any crook to force that safe,” Von Bork answered. ²⁰⁸“You won't cut that metal with any tool.”

²⁰⁹“But the lock?”

²¹⁰“No, it's a double combination lock. ²¹¹You know what that is?”

²¹²“Search me,” said the American.

²¹³“Well, you need a word as well as a set of figures before you can get the lock to work.” ²¹⁴He rose and showed a double-radiating disc round the keyhole. ²¹⁵“This outer one is for the letters, the inner one for the figures.”

²¹⁶“Well, well, that's fine.”

²¹⁷“So it's not quite as simple as you thought. ²¹⁸It was four years ago that I had it made, and what do you think I chose for the word and figures?”

²¹⁹“It's beyond me.”

²²⁰“Well, I chose August for the word, and 1914 for the figures, and here we are.”

²²¹The American's face showed his surprise and admiration.

²²²“My, but that was smart! ²²³You had it down to a fine thing.”

²²⁴“Yes, a few of us even then could have guessed the date. ²²⁵Here it is, and I'm shutting down to-morrow morning.”

²²⁶“Well, I guess you'll have to fix me up also. ²²⁷I'm not staying in this goldarned country all on my lonesome. ²²⁸In a week or less, from what I see, John Bull will be on his hind legs and fair ramping. ²²⁹I'd rather watch him from over the water.”

²³⁰“But you're an American citizen?”

²³¹“Well, so was Jack James an American citizen, but he's doing time in Portland all the same. ²³²It cuts no ice with a British copper to tell him you're an American citizen. ²³³It's British law and order over

here,' says he. ²³⁴By the way, mister, talking of Jack James, it seems to me you don't do much to cover your men."

²³⁵"What do you mean?" Von Bork asked sharply.

²³⁶"Well, you are their employer, ain't you? ²³⁷It's up to you to see that they don't fall down. ²³⁸But they do fall down, and when did you ever pick them up? ²³⁹There's James—"

²⁴⁰"It was James's own fault. ²⁴¹You know that yourself. ²⁴²He was too self-willed for the job."

²⁴³"James was a bonehead—I give you that. ²⁴⁴Then there was Hollis."

²⁴⁵"The man was mad."

²⁴⁶"Well, he went a bit woozy towards the end. ²⁴⁷It's enough to make a man bug-house when he has to play a part from morning to night with a hundred guys all ready to set the coppers wise to him. ²⁴⁸But now there is Steiner—"

²⁴⁹Von Bork started violently, and his ruddy face turned a shade paler.

²⁵⁰"What about Steiner?"

²⁵¹"Well, they've got him, that's all. ²⁵²They raided his store last night, and he and his papers are all in Portsmouth jail. ²⁵³You'll go off and he, poor devil, will have to stand the racket, and lucky if he gets off with his life. ²⁵⁴That's why I want to get over the water as soon as you do."

²⁵⁵Von Bork was a strong, self-contained man, but it was easy to see that the news had shaken him.

²⁵⁶"How could they have got on to Steiner?" he muttered. ²⁵⁷"That's the worst blow yet."

²⁵⁸"Well, you nearly had a worse one, for I believe they are not far off me."

²⁵⁹"You don't mean that!"

²⁶⁰"Sure thing. ²⁶¹My landlady down Fratton way had some inquiries, and when I heard of it I guessed it was time for me to hustle. ²⁶²But what I want to know, mister, is how the coppers know these things? ²⁶³Steiner is the fifth man you've lost since I signed on with you, and I know the name of the sixth if I don't get a move on. ²⁶⁴How do you explain it, and ain't you ashamed to see your men go down like this?"

²⁶⁵Von Bork flushed crimson.

²⁶⁶"How dare you speak in such a way!"

²⁶⁷"If I didn't dare things, mister, I wouldn't be in your service. ²⁶⁸But I'll tell you straight what is in my mind. ²⁶⁹I've heard that with you German politicians when an agent has done his work you are not sorry to see him put away."

²⁷⁰Von Bork sprang to his feet.

²⁷¹"Do you dare to suggest that I have given away my own agents!"

²⁷²"I don't stand for that, mister, but there's a stool pigeon or a cross somewhere, and it's up to you to find out where it is. ²⁷³Anyhow I am taking no more chances. ²⁷⁴It's me for little Holland, and the sooner the better."

²⁷⁵Von Bork had mastered his anger.

²⁷⁶"We have been allies too long to quarrel now at the very hour of victory," he said. ²⁷⁷"You've done splendid work and taken risks, and I can't forget it. ²⁷⁸By all means go to Holland, and you can get a

boat from Rotterdam to New York. ²⁷⁹No other line will be safe a week from now. ²⁸⁰I'll take that book and pack it with the rest."

²⁸¹The American held the small parcel in his hand, but made no motion to give it up.

²⁸²"What about the dough?" he asked.

²⁸³"The what?"

²⁸⁴"The boodle. ²⁸⁵The reward. ²⁸⁶The £500. ²⁸⁷The gunner turned damned nasty at the last, and I had to square him with an extra hundred dollars or it would have been nitsky for you and me. ²⁸⁸'Nothin' doin'!' says he, and he meant it, too, but the last hundred did it. ²⁸⁹It's cost me two hundred pound from first to last, so it isn't likely I'd give it up without gettin' my wad."

²⁹⁰Von Bork smiled with some bitterness. ²⁹¹"You don't seem to have a very high opinion of my honour," said he, "you want the money before you give up the book."

²⁹²"Well, mister, it is a business proposition."

²⁹³"All right. ²⁹⁴Have your way." ²⁹⁵He sat down at the table and scribbled a check, which he tore from the book, but he refrained from handing it to his companion. ²⁹⁶"After all, since we are to be on such terms, Mr. Altamont," said he, "I don't see why I should trust you any more than you trust me. ²⁹⁷Do you understand?" he added, looking back over his shoulder at the American. ²⁹⁸"There's the check upon the table. ²⁹⁹I claim the right to examine that parcel before you pick the money up."

³⁰⁰The American passed it over without a word. ³⁰¹Von Bork undid a winding of string and two wrappers of paper. ³⁰²Then he sat dazing for a moment in silent amazement at a small blue book which lay before him. ³⁰³Across the cover was printed in golden letters Practical Handbook of Bee Culture. ³⁰⁴Only for one instant did the master spy glare at this strangely irrelevant inscription. ³⁰⁵The next he was gripped at the back of his neck by a grasp of iron, and a chloroformed sponge was held in front of his writhing face.

³⁰⁶"Another glass, Watson!" said Mr. Sherlock Holmes as he extended the bottle of Imperial Tokay.

³⁰⁷The thickset chauffeur, who had seated himself by the table, pushed forward his glass with some eagerness.

³⁰⁸"It is a good wine, Holmes."

³⁰⁹"A remarkable wine, Watson. ³¹⁰Our friend upon the sofa has assured me that it is from Franz Josef's special cellar at the Schoenbrunn Palace. ³¹¹Might I trouble you to open the window, for chloroform vapour does not help the palate."

³¹²The safe was ajar, and Holmes standing in front of it was removing dossier after dossier, swiftly examining each, and then packing it neatly in Von Bork's valise. ³¹³The German lay upon the sofa sleeping stertorously with a strap round his upper arms and another round his legs.

³¹⁴"We need not hurry ourselves, Watson. ³¹⁵We are safe from interruption. ³¹⁶Would you mind touching the bell? ³¹⁷There is no one in the house except old Martha, who has played her part to admiration. ³¹⁸I got her the situation here when first I took the matter up. ³¹⁹Ah, Martha, you will be glad to hear that all is well."

³²⁰The pleasant old lady had appeared in the doorway. ³²¹She curtsied with a smile to Mr. Holmes, but glanced with some apprehension at the figure upon the sofa.

³²²"It is all right, Martha. ³²³He has not been hurt at all."

³²⁴“I am glad of that, Mr. Holmes. ³²⁵According to his lights he has been a kind master. ³²⁶He wanted me to go with his wife to Germany yesterday, but that would hardly have suited your plans, would it, sir?”

³²⁷“No, indeed, Martha. ³²⁸So long as you were here I was easy in my mind. ³²⁹We waited some time for your signal to-night.”

³³⁰“It was the secretary, sir.”

³³¹“I know. ³³²His car passed ours.”

³³³“I thought he would never go. ³³⁴I knew that it would not suit your plans, sir, to find him here.”

³³⁵“No, indeed. ³³⁶Well, it only meant that we waited half an hour or so until I saw your lamp go out and knew that the coast was clear. ³³⁷You can report to me to-morrow in London, Martha, at Claridge's Hotel.”

³³⁸“Very good, sir.”

³³⁹“I suppose you have everything ready to leave.”

³⁴⁰“Yes, sir. ³⁴¹He posted seven letters to-day. ³⁴²I have the addresses as usual.”

³⁴³“Very good, Martha. ³⁴⁴I will look into them to-morrow. ³⁴⁵Good-night. ³⁴⁶These papers,” he continued as the old lady vanished, “are not of very great importance, for, of course, the information which they represent has been sent off long ago to the German government. ³⁴⁷These are the originals which could not safely be got out of the country.”

³⁴⁸“Then they are of no use.”

³⁴⁹“I should not go so far as to say that, Watson. ³⁵⁰They will at least show our people what is known and what is not. ³⁵¹I may say that a good many of these papers have come through me, and I need not add are thoroughly untrustworthy. ³⁵²It would brighten my declining years to see a German cruiser navigating the Solent according to the mine-field plans which I have furnished. ³⁵³But you, Watson”—he stopped his work and took his old friend by the shoulders—“I've hardly seen you in the light yet. ³⁵⁴How have the years used you? ³⁵⁵You look the same blithe boy as ever.”

³⁵⁶“I feel twenty years younger, Holmes. ³⁵⁷I have seldom felt so happy as when I got your wire asking me to meet you at Harwich with the car. ³⁵⁸But you, Holmes—you have changed very little—save for that horrible goatee.”

³⁵⁹“These are the sacrifices one makes for one's country, Watson,” said Holmes, pulling at his little tuft. ³⁶⁰“To-morrow it will be but a dreadful memory. ³⁶¹With my hair cut and a few other superficial changes I shall no doubt reappear at Claridge's to-morrow as I was before this American stunt—I beg your pardon, Watson, my well of English seems to be permanently defiled—before this American job came my way.”

³⁶²“But you have retired, Holmes. ³⁶³We heard of you as living the life of a hermit among your bees and your books in a small farm upon the South Downs.”

³⁶⁴“Exactly, Watson. ³⁶⁵Here is the fruit of my leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years!” ³⁶⁶He picked up the volume from the table and read out the whole title, Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen. ³⁶⁷“Alone I did it. ³⁶⁸Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London.”

³⁶⁹“But how did you get to work again?”

³⁷⁰“Ah, I have often marvelled at it myself. ³⁷¹The Foreign Minister alone I could have withstood, but when the Premier also deigned to visit my humble roof—! ³⁷²The fact is, Watson, that this gentleman upon the sofa was a bit too good for our people. ³⁷³He was in a class by himself. ³⁷⁴Things were going wrong, and no one could understand why they were going wrong. ³⁷⁵Agents were suspected or even caught, but there was evidence of some strong and secret central force. ³⁷⁶It was absolutely necessary to expose it. ³⁷⁷Strong pressure was brought upon me to look into the matter. ³⁷⁸It has cost me two years, Watson, but they have not been devoid of excitement. ³⁷⁹When I say that I started my pilgrimage at Chicago, graduated in an Irish secret society at Buffalo, gave serious trouble to the constabulary at Skibbareen, and so eventually caught the eye of a subordinate agent of Von Bork, who recommended me as a likely man, you will realize that the matter was complex. ³⁸⁰Since then I have been honoured by his confidence, which has not prevented most of his plans going subtly wrong and five of his best agents being in prison. ³⁸¹I watched them, Watson, and I picked them as they ripened. ³⁸²Well, sir, I hope that you are none the worse!”

³⁸³The last remark was addressed to Von Bork himself, who after much gasping and blinking had lain quietly listening to Holmes's statement. ³⁸⁴He broke out now into a furious stream of German invective, his face convulsed with passion. ³⁸⁵Holmes continued his swift investigation of documents while his prisoner cursed and swore.

³⁸⁶“Though unmusical, German is the most expressive of all languages,” he observed when Von Bork had stopped from pure exhaustion. ³⁸⁷“Hullo! ³⁸⁸Hullo!” he added as he looked hard at the corner of a tracing before putting it in the box. ³⁸⁹“This should put another bird in the cage. ³⁹⁰I had no idea that the paymaster was such a rascal, though I have long had an eye upon him. ³⁹¹Mister Von Bork, you have a great deal to answer for.”

³⁹²The prisoner had raised himself with some difficulty upon the sofa and was staring with a strange mixture of amazement and hatred at his captor.

³⁹³“I shall get level with you, Altamont,” he said, speaking with slow deliberation. ³⁹⁴“If it takes me all my life I shall get level with you!”

³⁹⁵“The old sweet song,” said Holmes. ³⁹⁶“How often have I heard it in days gone by. ³⁹⁷It was a favorite ditty of the late lamented Professor Moriarty. ³⁹⁸Colonel Sebastian Moran has also been known to warble it. ³⁹⁹And yet I live and keep bees upon the South Downs.”

⁴⁰⁰“Curse you, you double traitor!” cried the German, straining against his bonds and glaring murder from his furious eyes.

⁴⁰¹“No, no, it is not so bad as that,” said Holmes, smiling. ⁴⁰²“As my speech surely shows you, Mr. Altamont of Chicago had no existence in fact. ⁴⁰³I used him and he is gone.”

⁴⁰⁴“Then who are you?”

⁴⁰⁵“It is really immaterial who I am, but since the matter seems to interest you, Mr. Von Bork, I may say that this is not my first acquaintance with the members of your family. ⁴⁰⁶I have done a good deal of business in Germany in the past and my name is probably familiar to you.”

⁴⁰⁷“I would wish to know it,” said the Prussian grimly.

⁴⁰⁸“It was I who brought about the separation between Irene Adler and the late King of Bohemia when your cousin Heinrich was the Imperial Envoy. ⁴⁰⁹It was I also who saved from murder, by the Nihilist Klopman, Count Von und Zu Grafenstein, who was your mother's elder brother. ⁴¹⁰It was I—”

⁴¹¹Von Bork sat up in amazement.

⁴¹²“There is only one man,” he cried.

⁴¹³“Exactly,” said Holmes.

⁴¹⁴Von Bork groaned and sank back on the sofa. ⁴¹⁵“And most of that information came through you,” he cried. ⁴¹⁶“What is it worth? ⁴¹⁷What have I done? ⁴¹⁸It is my ruin forever!”

⁴¹⁹“It is certainly a little untrustworthy,” said Holmes. ⁴²⁰“It will require some checking and you have little time to check it. ⁴²¹Your admiral may find the new guns rather larger than he expects, and the cruisers perhaps a trifle faster.”

⁴²²Von Bork clutched at his own throat in despair.

⁴²³“There are a good many other points of detail which will, no doubt, come to light in good time. ⁴²⁴But you have one quality which is very rare in a German, Mr. Von Bork: you are a sportsman and you will bear me no ill-will when you realize that you, who have outwitted so many other people, have at last been outwitted yourself. ⁴²⁵After all, you have done your best for your country, and I have done my best for mine, and what could be more natural? ⁴²⁶Besides,” he added, not unkindly, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the prostrate man, “it is better than to fall before some ignoble foe. ⁴²⁷These papers are now ready, Watson. ⁴²⁸If you will help me with our prisoner, I think that we may get started for London at once.”

⁴²⁹It was no easy task to move Von Bork, for he was a strong and a desperate man. ⁴³⁰Finally, holding either arm, the two friends walked him very slowly down the garden walk which he had trod with such proud confidence when he received the congratulations of the famous diplomatist only a few hours before. ⁴³¹After a short, final struggle he was hoisted, still bound hand and foot, into the spare seat of the little car. ⁴³²His precious valise was wedged in beside him.

⁴³³“I trust that you are as comfortable as circumstances permit,” said Holmes when the final arrangements were made. ⁴³⁴“Should I be guilty of a liberty if I lit a cigar and placed it between your lips?”

⁴³⁵But all amenities were wasted upon the angry German.

⁴³⁶“I suppose you realize, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said he, “that if your government bears you out in this treatment it becomes an act of war.”

⁴³⁷“What about your government and all this treatment?” said Holmes, tapping the valise.

⁴³⁸“You are a private individual. ⁴³⁹You have no warrant for my arrest. ⁴⁴⁰The whole proceeding is absolutely illegal and outrageous.”

⁴⁴¹“Absolutely,” said Holmes.

⁴⁴²“Kidnapping a German subject.”

⁴⁴³“And stealing his private papers.”

⁴⁴⁴“Well, you realize your position, you and your accomplice here. ⁴⁴⁵If I were to shout for help as we pass through the village—”

⁴⁴⁶“My dear sir, if you did anything so foolish you would probably enlarge the two limited titles of our village inns by giving us ‘The Dangling Prussian’ as a signpost. ⁴⁴⁷The Englishman is a patient creature, but at present his temper is a little inflamed, and it would be as well not to try him too far. ⁴⁴⁸No, Mr. Von Bork, you will go with us in a quiet, sensible fashion to Scotland Yard, whence you can send for your friend, Baron Von Herling, and see if even now you may not fill that place which he has reserved for you in the ambassadorial suite. ⁴⁴⁹As to you, Watson, you are joining us with your old service, as I understand, so London won't be out of your way. ⁴⁵⁰Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have.”

⁴⁵¹The two friends chatted in intimate converse for a few minutes, recalling once again the days of the past, while their prisoner vainly wriggled to undo the bonds that held him. ⁴⁵²As they turned to the car Holmes pointed back to the moonlit sea and shook a thoughtful head.

⁴⁵³“There's an east wind coming, Watson.”

⁴⁵⁴“I think not, Holmes. ⁴⁵⁵It is very warm.”

⁴⁵⁶“Good old Watson! ⁴⁵⁷You are the one fixed point in a changing age. ⁴⁵⁸There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. ⁴⁵⁹It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. ⁴⁶⁰But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. ⁴⁶¹Start her up, Watson, for it's time that we were on our way. ⁴⁶²I have a check for five hundred pounds which should be cashed early, for the drawer is quite capable of stopping it if he can.”

The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes

Preface

I fear that Mr. Sherlock Holmes may become like one of those popular tenors who, having outlived their time, are still tempted to make repeated farewell bows to their indulgent audiences. This must cease and he must go the way of all flesh, material or imaginary. One likes to think that there is some fantastic limbo for the children of imagination, some strange, impossible place where the beaux of Fielding may still make love to the belles of Richardson, where Scott's heroes still may strut, Dickens's delightful Cockneys still raise a laugh, and Thackeray's worldlings continue to carry on their reprehensible careers. Perhaps in some humble corner of such a Valhalla, Sherlock and his Watson may for a time find a place, while some more astute sleuth with some even less astute comrade may fill the stage which they have vacated.

His career has been a long one—though it is possible to exaggerate it; decrepit gentlemen who approach me and declare that his adventures formed the reading of their boyhood do not meet the response from me which they seem to expect. One is not anxious to have one's personal dates handled so unkindly. As a matter of cold fact, Holmes made his debut in *A Study in Scarlet* and in *The Sign of Four*, two small booklets which appeared between 1887 and 1889. It was in 1891 that “*A Scandal in Bohemia*,” the first of the long series of short stories, appeared in *The Strand Magazine*. The public seemed appreciative and desirous of more, so that from that date, thirty-nine years ago, they have been produced in a broken series which now contains no fewer than fifty-six stories, republished in *The Adventures*, *The Memoirs*, *The Return*, and *His Last Bow*. And there remain these twelve published during the last few years which are here produced under the title of *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*. He began his adventures in the very heart of the later Victorian era, carried it through the all-too-short reign of Edward, and has managed to hold his own little niche even in these feverish days. Thus it would be true to say that those who first read of him, as young men, have lived to see their own grown-up children following the same adventures in the same magazine. It is a striking example of the patience and loyalty of the British public.

I had fully determined at the conclusion of *The Memoirs* to bring Holmes to an end, as I felt that my literary energies should not be directed too much into one channel. That pale, clear-cut face and loose-limbed figure were taking up an undue share of my imagination. I did the deed, but fortunately no coroner had pronounced upon the remains, and so, after a long interval, it was not difficult for me to respond to the flattering demand and to explain my rash act away. I have never regretted it, for I have not in actual practice found that these lighter sketches have prevented me from exploring and finding my limitations in such varied branches of literature as history, poetry, historical novels, psychic research, and the drama. Had Holmes never existed I could not have done more, though he may perhaps have stood a little in the way of the recognition of my more serious literary work.

And so, reader, farewell to Sherlock Holmes! I thank you for your past constancy, and can but hope that some return has been made in the shape of that distraction from the worries of life and stimulating change of thought which can only be found in the fairy kingdom of romance.

Arthur Conan Doyle

The Illustrious Client

¹“It can't hurt now,” was Mr. Sherlock Holmes's comment when, for the tenth time in as many years, I asked his leave to reveal the following narrative. ²So it was that at last I obtained permission to put on record what was, in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend's career.

³Both Holmes and I had a weakness for the Turkish bath. ⁴It was over a smoke in the pleasant lassitude of the drying-room that I have found him less reticent and more human than anywhere else. ⁵On the upper floor of the Northumberland Avenue establishment there is an isolated corner where two couches lie side by side, and it was on these that we lay upon September 3, 1902, the day when my narrative begins. ⁶I had asked him whether anything was stirring, and for answer he had shot his long, thin, nervous arm out of the sheets which enveloped him and had drawn an envelope from the inside pocket of the coat which hung beside him.

⁸“It may be some fussy, self-important fool; it may be a matter of life or death,” said he as he handed me the note. ⁹“I know no more than this message tells me.”

¹⁰It was from the Carlton Club and dated the evening before. ¹¹This is what I read:

¹²Sir James Damery presents his compliments to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and will call upon him at 4.30 to-morrow. ¹³Sir James begs to say that the matter upon which he desires to consult Mr. Holmes is very delicate and also very important. ¹⁴He trusts, therefore, that Mr. Holmes will make every effort to grant this interview, and that he will confirm it over the telephone to the Carlton Club.

¹⁵“I need not say that I have confirmed it, Watson,” said Holmes as I returned the paper. ¹⁶“Do you know anything of this man Damery?”

¹⁷“Only that this name is a household word in society.”

¹⁸“Well, I can tell you a little more than that. ¹⁹He has rather a reputation for arranging delicate matters which are to be kept out of the papers. ²⁰You may remember his negotiations with Sir George Lewis over the Hammerford Will case. ²¹He is a man of the world with a natural turn for diplomacy. ²²I am bound, therefore, to hope that it is not a false scent and that he has some real need for our assistance.”

²³“Our?”

²⁴“Well, if you will be so good, Watson.”

²⁵“I shall be honoured.”

²⁶“Then you have the hour—4.30. ²⁷Until then we can put the matter out of our heads.”

²⁸I was living in my own rooms in Queen Anne Street at the time, but I was round at Baker Street before the time named. ²⁹Sharp to the half-hour, Colonel Sir James Damery was announced. ³⁰It is hardly necessary to describe him, for many will remember that large, bluff, honest personality, that broad, clean-shaven face, and, above all, that pleasant, mellow voice. ³¹Frankness shone from his gray Irish eyes, and good humour played round his mobile, smiling lips. ³²His lucent top-hat, his dark frock-coat, indeed, every detail, from the pearl pin in the black satin cravat to the lavender spats over the varnished shoes, spoke of the meticulous care in dress for which he was famous. ³³The big, masterful aristocrat dominated the little room.

³⁴“Of course, I was prepared to find Dr. Watson,” he remarked with a courteous bow. ³⁵“His collaboration may be very necessary, for we are dealing on this occasion, Mr. Holmes, with a man to

whom violence is familiar and who will, literally, stick at nothing. ³⁶I should say that there is no more dangerous man in Europe.”

³⁷“I have had several opponents to whom that flattering term has been applied,” said Holmes with a smile. ³⁸“Don’t you smoke? ³⁹Then you will excuse me if I light my pipe. ⁴⁰If your man is more dangerous than the late Professor Moriarty, or than the living Colonel Sebastian Moran, then he is indeed worth meeting. ⁴¹May I ask his name?”

⁴²“Have you ever heard of Baron Gruner?”

⁴³“You mean the Austrian murderer?”

⁴⁴Colonel Damery threw up his kid-gloved hands with a laugh. ⁴⁵“There is no getting past you, Mr. Holmes! ⁴⁶Wonderful! ⁴⁷So you have already sized him up as a murderer?”

⁴⁸“It is my business to follow the details of Continental crime. ⁴⁹Who could possibly have read what happened at Prague and have any doubts as to the man’s guilt! ⁵⁰It was a purely technical legal point and the suspicious death of a witness that saved him! ⁵¹I am as sure that he killed his wife when the so-called ‘accident’ happened in the Splugen Pass as if I had seen him do it. ⁵²I knew, also, that he had come to England and had a presentiment that sooner or later he would find me some work to do. ⁵³Well, what has Baron Gruner been up to? ⁵⁴I presume it is not this old tragedy which has come up again?”

⁵⁵“No, it is more serious than that. ⁵⁶To revenge crime is important, but to prevent it is more so. ⁵⁷It is a terrible thing, Mr. Holmes, to see a dreadful event, an atrocious situation, preparing itself before your eyes, to clearly understand whither it will lead and yet to be utterly unable to avert it. ⁵⁸Can a human being be placed in a more trying position?”

⁵⁹“Perhaps not.”

⁶⁰“Then you will sympathize with the client in whose interests I am acting.”

⁶¹“I did not understand that you were merely an intermediary. ⁶²Who is the principal?”

⁶³“Mr. Holmes, I must beg you not to press that question. ⁶⁴It is important that I should be able to assure him that his honoured name has been in no way dragged into the matter. ⁶⁵His motives are, to the last degree, honourable and chivalrous, but he prefers to remain unknown. ⁶⁶I need not say that your fees will be assured and that you will be given a perfectly free hand. ⁶⁷Surely the actual name of your client is immaterial?”

⁶⁸“I am sorry,” said Holmes. ⁶⁹“I am accustomed to have mystery at one end of my cases, but to have it at both ends is too confusing. ⁷⁰I fear, Sir James, that I must decline to act.”

⁷¹Our visitor was greatly disturbed. ⁷²His large, sensitive face was darkened with emotion and disappointment.

⁷³“You hardly realize the effect of your own action, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ⁷⁴“You place me in a most serious dilemma, for I am perfectly certain that you would be proud to take over the case if I could give you the facts, and yet a promise forbids me from revealing them all. ⁷⁵May I, at least, lay all that I can before you?”

⁷⁶“By all means, so long as it is understood that I commit myself to nothing.”

⁷⁷“That is understood. ⁷⁸In the first place, you have no doubt heard of General de Merville?”

⁷⁹“De Merville of Khyber fame? ⁸⁰Yes, I have heard of him.”

⁸¹“He has a daughter, Violet de Merville, young, rich, beautiful, accomplished, a wonder-woman in every way. ⁸²It is this daughter, this lovely, innocent girl, whom we are endeavouring to save from the clutches of a fiend.”

⁸³“Baron Gruner has some hold over her, then?”

⁸⁴“The strongest of all holds where a woman is concerned—the hold of love. ⁸⁵The fellow is, as you may have heard, extraordinarily handsome, with a most fascinating manner, a gentle voice, and that air of romance and mystery which means so much to a woman. ⁸⁶He is said to have the whole sex at his mercy and to have made ample use of the fact.”

⁸⁷“But how came such a man to meet a lady of the standing of Miss Violet de Merville?”

⁸⁸“It was on a Mediterranean yachting voyage. ⁸⁹The company, though select, paid their own passages. ⁹⁰No doubt the promoters hardly realized the Baron's true character until it was too late. ⁹¹The villain attached himself to the lady, and with such effect that he has completely and absolutely won her heart. ⁹²To say that she loves him hardly expresses it. ⁹³She dotes upon him; she is obsessed by him. ⁹⁴Outside of him there is nothing on earth. ⁹⁵She will not hear one word against him. ⁹⁶Everything has been done to cure her of her madness, but in vain. ⁹⁷To sum up, she proposes to marry him next month. ⁹⁸As she is of age and has a will of iron, it is hard to know how to prevent her.”

⁹⁹“Does she know about the Austrian episode?”

¹⁰⁰“The cunning devil has told her every unsavoury public scandal of his past life, but always in such a way as to make himself out to be an innocent martyr. ¹⁰¹She absolutely accepts his version and will listen to no other.”

¹⁰²“Dear me! ¹⁰³But surely you have inadvertently let out the name of your client? ¹⁰⁴It is no doubt General de Merville.”

¹⁰⁵Our visitor fidgeted in his chair.

¹⁰⁶“I could deceive you by saying so, Mr. Holmes, but it would not be true. ¹⁰⁷De Merville is a broken man. ¹⁰⁸The strong soldier has been utterly demoralized by this incident. ¹⁰⁹He has lost the nerve which never failed him on the battlefield and has become a weak, doddering old man, utterly incapable of contending with a brilliant, forceful rascal like this Austrian. ¹¹⁰My client, however, is an old friend, one who has known the General intimately for many years and taken a paternal interest in this young girl since she wore short frocks. ¹¹¹He cannot see this tragedy consummated without some attempt to stop it. ¹¹²There is nothing in which Scotland Yard can act. ¹¹³It was his own suggestion that you should be called in, but it was, as I have said, on the express stipulation that he should not be personally involved in the matter. ¹¹⁴I have no doubt, Mr. Holmes, with your great powers you could easily trace my client back through me, but I must ask you, as a point of honour, to refrain from doing so, and not to break in upon his incognito.”

¹¹⁵Holmes gave a whimsical smile.

¹¹⁶“I think I may safely promise that,” said he. ¹¹⁷“I may add that your problem interests me, and that I shall be prepared to look into it. ¹¹⁸How shall I keep in touch with you?”

¹¹⁹“The Carlton Club will find me. ¹²⁰But in case of emergency, there is a private telephone call, ‘XX.31.’”

¹²¹Holmes noted it down and sat, still smiling, with the open memorandum-book upon his knee.

¹²²“The Baron's present address, please?”

¹²³“Vernon Lodge, near Kingston. ¹²⁴It is a large house. ¹²⁵He has been fortunate in some rather shady speculations and is a rich man, which naturally makes him a more dangerous antagonist.”

¹²⁶“Is he at home at present?”

¹²⁷“Yes.”

¹²⁸“Apart from what you have told me, can you give me any further information about the man?”

¹²⁹“He has expensive tastes. ¹³⁰He is a horse fancier. ¹³¹For a short time he played polo at Hurlingham, but then this Prague affair got noised about and he had to leave. ¹³²He collects books and pictures. ¹³³He is a man with a considerable artistic side to his nature. ¹³⁴He is, I believe, a recognized authority upon Chinese pottery and has written a book upon the subject.”

¹³⁵“A complex mind,” said Holmes. ¹³⁶“All great criminals have that. ¹³⁷My old friend Charlie Peace was a violin virtuoso. ¹³⁸Wainwright was no mean artist. ¹³⁹I could quote many more. ¹⁴⁰Well, Sir James, you will inform your client that I am turning my mind upon Baron Gruner. ¹⁴¹I can say no more. ¹⁴²I have some sources of information of my own, and I dare say we may find some means of opening the matter up.”

¹⁴³When our visitor had left us Holmes sat so long in deep thought that it seemed to me that he had forgotten my presence. ¹⁴⁴At last, however, he came briskly back to earth.

¹⁴⁵“Well, Watson, any views?” he asked.

¹⁴⁶“I should think you had better see the young lady herself.”

¹⁴⁷“My dear Watson, if her poor old broken father cannot move her, how shall I, a stranger, prevail?

¹⁴⁸And yet there is something in the suggestion if all else fails. ¹⁴⁹But I think we must begin from a different angle. ¹⁵⁰I rather fancy that Shinwell Johnson might be a help.”

¹⁵¹I have not had occasion to mention Shinwell Johnson in these memoirs because I have seldom drawn my cases from the latter phases of my friend's career. ¹⁵²During the first years of the century he became a valuable assistant. ¹⁵³Johnson, I grieve to say, made his name first as a very dangerous villain and served two terms at Parkhurst. ¹⁵⁴Finally he repented and allied himself to Holmes, acting as his agent in the huge criminal underworld of London and obtaining information which often proved to be of vital importance. ¹⁵⁵Had Johnson been a “nark” of the police he would soon have been exposed, but as he dealt with cases which never came directly into the courts, his activities were never realized by his companions. ¹⁵⁶With the glamour of his two convictions upon him, he had the entree of every night-club, doss house, and gambling-den in the town, and his quick observation and active brain made him an ideal agent for gaining information. ¹⁵⁷It was to him that Sherlock Holmes now proposed to turn.

¹⁵⁸It was not possible for me to follow the immediate steps taken by my friend, for I had some pressing professional business of my own, but I met him by appointment that evening at Simpson's, where, sitting at a small table in the front window and looking down at the rushing stream of life in the Strand, he told me something of what had passed.

¹⁵⁹“Johnson is on the prowl,” said he. ¹⁶⁰“He may pick up some garbage in the darker recesses of the underworld, for it is down there, amid the black roots of crime, that we must hunt for this man's secrets.”

¹⁶¹“But if the lady will not accept what is already known, why should any fresh discovery of yours turn her from her purpose?”

¹⁶²“Who knows, Watson? ¹⁶³Woman's heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. ¹⁶⁴Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle. ¹⁶⁵Baron Gruner remarked to me—”

¹⁶⁶“He remarked to you!”

¹⁶⁷“Oh, to be sure, I had not told you of my plans. ¹⁶⁸Well, Watson, I love to come to close grips with my man. ¹⁶⁹I like to meet him eye to eye and read for myself the stuff that he is made of. ¹⁷⁰When I had given Johnson his instructions I took a cab out to Kingston and found the Baron in a most affable mood.”

¹⁷¹“Did he recognize you?”

¹⁷²“There was no difficulty about that, for I simply sent in my card. ¹⁷³He is an excellent antagonist, cool as ice, silky voiced and soothing as one of your fashionable consultants, and poisonous as a cobra. ¹⁷⁴He has breeding in him—a real aristocrat of crime, with a superficial suggestion of afternoon tea and all the cruelty of the grave behind it. ¹⁷⁵Yes, I am glad to have had my attention called to Baron Adelbert Gruner.”

¹⁷⁶“You say he was affable?”

¹⁷⁷“A purring cat who thinks he sees prospective mice. ¹⁷⁸Some people's affability is more deadly than the violence of coarser souls. ¹⁷⁹His greeting was characteristic. ¹⁸⁰I rather thought I should see you sooner or later, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ¹⁸¹“You have been engaged, no doubt by General de Merville, to endeavour to stop my marriage with his daughter, Violet. ¹⁸²That is so, is it not?”

¹⁸³“I acquiesced.

¹⁸⁴“My dear man,” said he, “you will only ruin your own well-deserved reputation. ¹⁸⁵It is not a case in which you can possibly succeed. ¹⁸⁶You will have barren work, to say nothing of incurring some danger. ¹⁸⁷Let me very strongly advise you to draw off at once.”

¹⁸⁸“It is curious,” I answered, “but that was the very advice which I had intended to give you. ¹⁸⁹I have a respect for your brains, Baron, and the little which I have seen of your personality has not lessened it. ¹⁹⁰Let me put it to you as man to man. ¹⁹¹No one wants to rake up your past and make you unduly uncomfortable. ¹⁹²It is over, and you are now in smooth waters, but if you persist in this marriage you will raise up a swarm of powerful enemies who will never leave you alone until they have made England too hot to hold you. ¹⁹³Is the game worth it? ¹⁹⁴Surely you would be wiser if you left the lady alone. ¹⁹⁵It would not be pleasant for you if these facts of your past were brought to her notice.”

¹⁹⁶“The Baron has little waxed tips of hair under his nose, like the short antennae of an insect. ¹⁹⁷These quivered with amusement as he listened, and he finally broke into a gentle chuckle.

¹⁹⁸“Excuse my amusement, Mr. Holmes,” said he, “but it is really funny to see you trying to play a hand with no cards in it. ¹⁹⁹I don't think anyone could do it better, but it is rather pathetic, all the same. ²⁰⁰Not a colour card there, Mr. Holmes, nothing but the smallest of the small.”

²⁰¹“So you think.”

²⁰²“So I know. ²⁰³Let me make the thing clear to you, for my own hand is so strong that I can afford to show it. ²⁰⁴I have been fortunate enough to win the entire affection of this lady. ²⁰⁵This was given to me in spite of the fact that I told her very clearly of all the unhappy incidents in my past life. ²⁰⁶I also told her that certain wicked and designing persons—I hope you recognize yourself—would come to her and tell her these things, and I warned her how to treat them. ²⁰⁷You have heard of post-hypnotic suggestion, Mr. Holmes? ²⁰⁸Well, you will see how it works, for a man of personality can use hypnotism without any vulgar passes or tomfoolery. ²⁰⁹So she is ready for you and, I have no doubt, would give you an appointment, for she is quite amenable to her father's will—save only in the one little matter.”

²¹⁰“Well, Watson, there seemed to be no more to say, so I took my leave with as much cold dignity as I could summon, but, as I had my hand on the door-handle, he stopped me.

²¹¹“By the way, Mr. Holmes,” said he, “did you know Le Brun, the French agent?”

²¹²“Yes,” said I.

²¹³“Do you know what befell him?”

²¹⁴“I heard that he was beaten by some Apaches in the Montmartre district and crippled for life.”

²¹⁵“Quite true, Mr. Holmes. ²¹⁶By a curious coincidence he had been inquiring into my affairs only a week before. ²¹⁷Don't do it, Mr. Holmes; it's not a lucky thing to do. ²¹⁸Several have found that out. ²¹⁹My last word to you is, go your own way and let me go mine. ²²⁰Good-bye!”

²²¹“So there you are, Watson. ²²²You are up to date now.”

²²³“The fellow seems dangerous.”

²²⁴“Mighty dangerous. ²²⁵I disregard the blusterer, but this is the sort of man who says rather less than he means.”

²²⁶“Must you interfere? ²²⁷Does it really matter if he marries the girl?”

²²⁸“Considering that he undoubtedly murdered his last wife, I should say it mattered very much. ²²⁹Besides, the client! ²³⁰Well, well, we need not discuss that. ²³¹When you have finished your coffee you had best come home with me, for the blithe Shinwell will be there with his report.”

²³²We found him sure enough, a huge, coarse, red-faced, scorbutic man, with a pair of vivid black eyes which were the only external sign of the very cunning mind within. ²³³It seems that he had dived down into what was peculiarly his kingdom, and beside him on the settee was a brand which he had brought up in the shape of a slim, flame-like young woman with a pale, intense face, youthful, and yet so worn with sin and sorrow that one read the terrible years which had left their leprous mark upon her.

²³⁴“This is Miss Kitty Winter,” said Shinwell Johnson, waving his fat hand as an introduction. ²³⁵“What she don't know—well, there, she'll speak for herself. ²³⁶Put my hand right on her, Mr. Holmes, within an hour of your message.”

²³⁷“I'm easy to find,” said the young woman. ²³⁸“Hell, London, gets me every time. ²³⁹Same address for Porky Shinwell. ²⁴⁰We're old mates, Porky, you and I. ²⁴¹But, by cripes! there is another who ought to be down in a lower hell than we if there was any justice in the world! ²⁴²That is the man you are after, Mr. Holmes.”

²⁴³Holmes smiled. ²⁴⁴“I gather we have your good wishes, Miss Winter.”

²⁴⁵“If I can help to put him where he belongs, I'm yours to the rattle,” said our visitor with fierce energy. ²⁴⁶There was an intensity of hatred in her white, set face and her blazing eyes such as woman seldom and man never can attain. ²⁴⁷“You needn't go into my past, Mr. Holmes. ²⁴⁸That's neither here nor there. ²⁴⁹But what I am Adelbert Gruner made me. ²⁵⁰If I could pull him down!” ²⁵¹She clutched frantically with her hands into the air. ²⁵²“Oh, if I could only pull him into the pit where he has pushed so many!”

²⁵³“You know how the matter stands?”

²⁵⁴“Porky Shinwell has been telling me. ²⁵⁵He's after some other poor fool and wants to marry her this time. ²⁵⁶You want to stop it. ²⁵⁷Well, you surely know enough about this devil to prevent any decent girl in her senses wanting to be in the same parish with him.”

²⁵⁸“She is not in her senses. ²⁵⁹She is madly in love. ²⁶⁰She has been told all about him. ²⁶¹She cares nothing.”

²⁶²“Told about the murder?”

²⁶³“Yes.”

²⁶⁴“My Lord, she must have a nerve!”

²⁶⁵“She puts them all down as slanders.”

²⁶⁶“Couldn't you lay proofs before her silly eyes?”

²⁶⁷“Well, can you help us do so?”

²⁶⁸“Ain't I a proof myself? ²⁶⁹If I stood before her and told her how he used me—”

²⁷⁰“Would you do this?”

²⁷¹“Would I? ²⁷²Would I not!”

²⁷³“Well, it might be worth trying. ²⁷⁴But he has told her most of his sins and had pardon from her, and I understand she will not reopen the question.”

²⁷⁵“I'll lay he didn't tell her all,” said Miss Winter. ²⁷⁶“I caught a glimpse of one or two murders besides the one that made such a fuss. ²⁷⁷He would speak of someone in his velvet way and then look at me with a steady eye and say: ²⁷⁸‘He died within a month.’ ²⁷⁹It wasn't hot air, either. ²⁸⁰But I took little notice—you see, I loved him myself at that time. ²⁸¹Whatever he did went with me, same as with this poor fool! ²⁸²There was just one thing that shook me. ²⁸³Yes, by cripes! if it had not been for his poisonous, lying tongue that explains and soothes, I'd have left him that very night. ²⁸⁴It's a book he has—a brown leather book with a lock, and his arms in gold on the outside. ²⁸⁵I think he was a bit drunk that night, or he would not have shown it to me.”

²⁸⁶“What was it, then?”

²⁸⁷“I tell you, Mr. Holmes, this man collects women, and takes a pride in his collection, as some men collect moths or butterflies. ²⁸⁸He had it all in that book. ²⁸⁹Snapshot photographs, names, details, everything about them. ²⁹⁰It was a beastly book—a book no man, even if he had come from the gutter, could have put together. ²⁹¹But it was Adelbert Gruner's book all the same. ²⁹²‘Souls I have ruined.’ ²⁹³He could have put that on the outside if he had been so minded. ²⁹⁴However, that's neither here nor there, for the book would not serve you, and, if it would, you can't get it.”

²⁹⁵“Where is it?”

²⁹⁶“How can I tell you where it is now? ²⁹⁷It's more than a year since I left him. ²⁹⁸I know where he kept it then. ²⁹⁹He's a precise, tidy cat of a man in many of his ways, so maybe it is still in the pigeon-hole of the old bureau in the inner study. ³⁰⁰Do you know his house?”

³⁰¹“I've been in the study,” said Holmes.

³⁰²“Have you, though? ³⁰³You haven't been slow on the job if you only started this morning. ³⁰⁴Maybe dear Adelbert has met his match this time. ³⁰⁵The outer study is the one with the Chinese crockery in it—big glass cupboard between the windows. ³⁰⁶Then behind his desk is the door that leads to the inner study—a small room where he keeps papers and things.”

³⁰⁷“Is he not afraid of burglars?”

³⁰⁸“Adelbert is no coward. ³⁰⁹His worst enemy couldn't say that of him. ³¹⁰He can look after himself. ³¹¹There's a burglar alarm at night. ³¹²Besides, what is there for a burglar—unless they got away with all this fancy crockery?”

³¹³“No good,” said Shinwell Johnson with the decided voice of the expert. ³¹⁴“No fence wants stuff of that sort that you can neither melt nor sell.”

³¹⁵“Quite so,” said Holmes. ³¹⁶“Well, now, Miss Winter, if you would call here to-morrow evening at five, I would consider in the meanwhile whether your suggestion of seeing this lady personally may not be arranged. ³¹⁷I am exceedingly obliged to you for your cooperation. ³¹⁸I need not say that my clients will consider liberally—”

³¹⁹“None of that, Mr. Holmes,” cried the young woman. ³²⁰“I am not out for money. ³²¹Let me see this man in the mud, and I’ve got all I’ve worked for—in the mud with my foot on his cursed face. ³²²That’s my price. ³²³I’m with you to-morrow or any other day so long as you are on his track. ³²⁴Porky here can tell you always where to find me.”

³²⁵I did not see Holmes again until the following evening when we dined once more at our Strand restaurant. ³²⁶He shrugged his shoulders when I asked him what luck he had had in his interview. ³²⁷Then he told the story, which I would repeat in this way. ³²⁸His hard, dry statement needs some little editing to soften it into the terms of real life.

³²⁹“There was no difficulty at all about the appointment,” said Holmes, “for the girl glories in showing abject filial obedience in all secondary things in an attempt to atone for her flagrant breach of it in her engagement. ³³⁰The General ‘phoned that all was ready, and the fiery Miss W. turned up according to schedule, so that at half-past five a cab deposited us outside 104 Berkeley Square, where the old soldier resides—one of those awful gray London castles which would make a church seem frivolous. ³³¹A footman showed us into a great yellow-curtained drawing-room, and there was the lady awaiting us, demure, pale, self-contained, as inflexible and remote as a snow image on a mountain.

³³²“I don’t quite know how to make her clear to you, Watson. ³³³Perhaps you may meet her before we are through, and you can use your own gift of words. ³³⁴She is beautiful, but with the ethereal other-world beauty of some fanatic whose thoughts are set on high. ³³⁵I have seen such faces in the pictures of the old masters of the Middle Ages. ³³⁶How a beastman could have laid his vile paws upon such a being of the beyond I cannot imagine. ³³⁷You may have noticed how extremes call to each other, the spiritual to the animal, the cave-man to the angel. ³³⁸You never saw a worse case than this.

³³⁹“She knew what we had come for, of course—that villain had lost no time in poisoning her mind against us. ³⁴⁰Miss Winter’s advent rather amazed her, I think, but she waved us into our respective chairs like a reverend abbess receiving two rather leprous mendicants. ³⁴¹If your head is inclined to swell, my dear Watson, take a course of Miss Violet de Merville.

³⁴²“‘Well, sir,’ said she in a voice like the wind from an iceberg, ‘your name is familiar to me. ³⁴³You have called, as I understand, to malign my fiancé, Baron Gruner. ³⁴⁴It is only by my father’s request that I see you at all, and I warn you in advance that anything you can say could not possibly have the slightest effect upon my mind.’

³⁴⁵“I was sorry for her, Watson. ³⁴⁶I thought of her for the moment as I would have thought of a daughter of my own. ³⁴⁷I am not often eloquent. ³⁴⁸I use my head, not my heart. ³⁴⁹But I really did plead with her with all the warmth of words that I could find in my nature. ³⁵⁰I pictured to her the awful position of the woman who only wakes to a man’s character after she is his wife—a woman who has to submit to be caressed by bloody hands and lecherous lips. ³⁵¹I spared her nothing—the shame, the fear, the agony, the hopelessness of it all. ³⁵²All my hot words could not bring one tinge of colour to those ivory cheeks or one gleam of emotion to those abstracted eyes. ³⁵³I thought of what the rascal had said about a post-hypnotic influence. ³⁵⁴One could really believe that she was living above the earth in some ecstatic dream. ³⁵⁵Yet there was nothing indefinite in her replies.

³⁵⁶“‘I have listened to you with patience, Mr. Holmes,’ said she. ³⁵⁷‘The effect upon my mind is exactly as predicted. ³⁵⁸I am aware that Adelbert, that my fiancé, has had a stormy life in which he has incurred bitter hatreds and most unjust aspersions. ³⁵⁹You are only the last of a series who have brought their slanders before me. ³⁶⁰Possibly you mean well, though I learn that you are a paid agent who would have

been equally willing to act for the Baron as against him. ³⁶¹But in any case I wish you to understand once for all that I love him and that he loves me, and that the opinion of all the world is no more to me than the twitter of those birds outside the window. ³⁶²If his noble nature has ever for an instant fallen, it may be that I have been specially sent to raise it to its true and lofty level. ³⁶³I am not clear'—here she turned eyes upon my companion—'who this young lady may be.'

³⁶⁴"I was about to answer when the girl broke in like a whirlwind. ³⁶⁵If ever you saw flame and ice face to face, it was those two women.

³⁶⁶"'I'll tell you who I am,' she cried, springing out of her chair, her mouth all twisted with passion—'I am his last mistress. ³⁶⁷I am one of a hundred that he has tempted and used and ruined and thrown into the refuse heap, as he will you also. ³⁶⁸Your refuse heap is more likely to be a grave, and maybe that's the best. ³⁶⁹I tell you, you foolish woman, if you marry this man he'll be the death of you. ³⁷⁰It may be a broken heart or it may be a broken neck, but he'll have you one way or the other. ³⁷¹It's not out of love for you I'm speaking. ³⁷²I don't care a tinker's curse whether you live or die. ³⁷³It's out of hate for him and to spite him and to get back on him for what he did to me. ³⁷⁴But it's all the same, and you needn't look at me like that, my fine lady, for you may be lower than I am before you are through with it.'

³⁷⁵"'I should prefer not to discuss such matters,' said Miss de Merville coldly. ³⁷⁶'Let me say once for all that I am aware of three passages in my fiancé's life in which he became entangled with designing women, and that I am assured of his hearty repentance for any evil that he may have done.'

³⁷⁷"'Three passages!' screamed my companion. ³⁷⁸'You fool! ³⁷⁹You unutterable fool!'

³⁸⁰"'Mr. Holmes, I beg that you will bring this interview to an end,' said the icy voice. ³⁸¹'I have obeyed my father's wish in seeing you, but I am not compelled to listen to the ravings of this person.'

³⁸²"With an oath Miss Winter darted forward, and if I had not caught her wrist she would have clutched this maddening woman by the hair. ³⁸³I dragged her towards the door and was lucky to get her back into the cab without a public scene, for she was beside herself with rage. ³⁸⁴In a cold way I felt pretty furious myself, Watson, for there was something indescribably annoying in the calm aloofness and supreme self-complaisance of the woman whom we were trying to save. ³⁸⁵So now once again you know exactly how we stand, and it is clear that I must plan some fresh opening move, for this gambit won't work. ³⁸⁶I'll keep in touch with you, Watson, for it is more than likely that you will have your part to play, though it is just possible that the next move may lie with them rather than with us."

³⁸⁷And it did. ³⁸⁸Their blow fell—or his blow rather, for never could I believe that the lady was privy to it. ³⁸⁹I think I could show you the very paving-stone upon which I stood when my eyes fell upon the placard, and a pang of horror passed through my very soul. ³⁹⁰It was between the Grand Hotel and Charing Cross Station, where a one-legged news-vender displayed his evening papers. ³⁹¹The date was just two days after the last conversation. ³⁹²There, black upon yellow, was the terrible news-sheet:

³⁹³Murderous Attack Upon Sherlock Holmes

³⁹⁴I think I stood stunned for some moments. ³⁹⁵Then I have a confused recollection of snatching at a paper, of the remonstrance of the man, whom I had not paid, and, finally, of standing in the doorway of a chemist's shop while I turned up the fateful paragraph. ³⁹⁶This was how it ran:

³⁹⁷We learn with regret that Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well-known private detective, was the victim this morning of a murderous assault which has left him in a precarious position. ³⁹⁸There are no exact details to hand, but the event seems to have occurred about twelve o'clock in Regent Street, outside the Cafe Royal. ³⁹⁹The attack was made by two men armed with sticks, and Mr. Holmes was beaten about the head and body, receiving injuries which the doctors describe as most serious. ⁴⁰⁰He was carried to Charing Cross Hospital and afterwards insisted upon being taken to his rooms in Baker Street. ⁴⁰¹The miscreants who attacked him appear to have been respectably dressed men, who escaped from the

bystanders by passing through the Cafe Royal and out into Glasshouse Street behind it. ⁴⁰²No doubt they belonged to that criminal fraternity which has so often had occasion to bewail the activity and ingenuity of the injured man.

⁴⁰³I need not say that my eyes had hardly glanced over the paragraph before I had sprung into a hansom and was on my way to Baker Street. ⁴⁰⁴I found Sir Leslie Oakshott, the famous surgeon, in the hall and his brougham waiting at the curb.

⁴⁰⁵“No immediate danger,” was his report. ⁴⁰⁶“Two lacerated scalp wounds and some considerable bruises. ⁴⁰⁷Several stitches have been necessary. ⁴⁰⁸Morphine has been injected and quiet is essential, but an interview of a few minutes would not be absolutely forbidden.”

⁴⁰⁹With this permission I stole into the darkened room. ⁴¹⁰The sufferer was wide awake, and I heard my name in a hoarse whisper. ⁴¹¹The blind was three-quarters down, but one ray of sunlight slanted through and struck the bandaged head of the injured man. ⁴¹²A crimson patch had soaked through the white linen compress. ⁴¹³I sat beside him and bent my head.

⁴¹⁴“All right, Watson. ⁴¹⁵Don't look so scared,” he muttered in a very weak voice. ⁴¹⁶“It's not as bad as it seems.”

⁴¹⁷“Thank God for that!”

⁴¹⁸“I'm a bit of a single-stick expert, as you know. ⁴¹⁹I took most of them on my guard. ⁴²⁰It was the second man that was too much for me.”

⁴²¹“What can I do, Holmes? ⁴²²Of course, it was that damned fellow who set them on. ⁴²³I'll go and thrash the hide off him if you give the word.”

⁴²⁴“Good old Watson! ⁴²⁵No, we can do nothing there unless the police lay their hands on the men. ⁴²⁶But their get-away had been well prepared. ⁴²⁷We may be sure of that. ⁴²⁸Wait a little. ⁴²⁹I have my plans. ⁴³⁰The first thing is to exaggerate my injuries. ⁴³¹They'll come to you for news. ⁴³²Put it on thick, Watson. ⁴³³Lucky if I live the week out—concussion—delirium—what you like! ⁴³⁴You can't overdo it.”

⁴³⁵“But Sir Leslie Oakshott?”

⁴³⁶“Oh, he's all right. ⁴³⁷He shall see the worst side of me. ⁴³⁸I'll look after that.”

⁴³⁹“Anything else?”

⁴⁴⁰“Yes. ⁴⁴¹Tell Shinwell Johnson to get that girl out of the way. ⁴⁴²Those beauties will be after her now. ⁴⁴³They know, of course, that she was with me in the case. ⁴⁴⁴If they dared to do me in it is not likely they will neglect her. ⁴⁴⁵That is urgent. ⁴⁴⁶Do it to-night.”

⁴⁴⁷“I'll go now. ⁴⁴⁸Anything more?”

⁴⁴⁹“Put my pipe on the table—and the tobacco-slipper. ⁴⁵⁰Right! ⁴⁵¹Come in each morning and we will plan our campaign.”

⁴⁵²I arranged with Johnson that evening to take Miss Winter to a quiet suburb and see that she lay low until the danger was past.

⁴⁵³For six days the public were under the impression that Holmes was at the door of death. ⁴⁵⁴The bulletins were very grave and there were sinister paragraphs in the papers. ⁴⁵⁵My continual visits assured me that it was not so bad as that. ⁴⁵⁶His wiry constitution and his determined will were working wonders. ⁴⁵⁷He was recovering fast, and I had suspicions at times that he was really finding himself faster than he pretended even to me. ⁴⁵⁸There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic

effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be. ⁴⁵⁹He pushed to an extreme the axiom that the only safe plotter was he who plotted alone. ⁴⁶⁰I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between.

⁴⁶¹On the seventh day the stitches were taken out, in spite of which there was a report of erysipelas in the evening papers. ⁴⁶²The same evening papers had an announcement which I was bound, sick or well, to carry to my friend. ⁴⁶³It was simply that among the passengers on the Cunard boat Ruritania, starting from Liverpool on Friday, was the Baron Adelbert Gruner, who had some important financial business to settle in the States before his impending wedding to Miss Violet de Merville, only daughter of, etc., etc. ⁴⁶⁴Holmes listened to the news with a cold, concentrated look upon his pale face, which told me that it hit him hard.

⁴⁶⁵"Friday!" he cried. ⁴⁶⁶"Only three clear days. ⁴⁶⁷I believe the rascal wants to put himself out of danger's way. ⁴⁶⁸But he won't, Watson! ⁴⁶⁹By the Lord Harry, he won't! ⁴⁷⁰Now, Watson, I want you to do something for me."

⁴⁷¹"I am here to be used, Holmes."

⁴⁷²"Well, then, spend the next twenty-four hours in an intensive study of Chinese pottery."

⁴⁷³He gave no explanations and I asked for none. ⁴⁷⁴By long experience I had learned the wisdom of obedience. ⁴⁷⁵But when I had left his room I walked down Baker Street, revolving in my head how on earth I was to carry out so strange an order. ⁴⁷⁶Finally I drove to the London Library in St. James's Square, put the matter to my friend Lomax, the sublibrarian, and departed to my rooms with a goodly volume under my arm.

⁴⁷⁷It is said that the barrister who crams up a case with such care that he can examine an expert witness upon the Monday has forgotten all his forced knowledge before the Saturday. ⁴⁷⁸Certainly I should not like now to pose as an authority upon ceramics. ⁴⁷⁹And yet all that evening, and all that night with a short interval for rest, and all next morning, I was sucking in knowledge and committing names to memory. ⁴⁸⁰There I learned of the hall-marks of the great artist-decorators, of the mystery of cyclical dates, the marks of the Hung-wu and the beauties of the Yung-lo, the writings of Tang-ying, and the glories of the primitive period of the Sung and the Yuan. ⁴⁸¹I was charged with all this information when I called upon Holmes next evening. ⁴⁸²He was out of bed now, though you would not have guessed it from the published reports, and he sat with his much-bandaged head resting upon his hand in the depth of his favourite armchair.

⁴⁸³"Why, Holmes," I said, "if one believed the papers, you are dying."

⁴⁸⁴"That," said he, "is the very impression which I intended to convey. ⁴⁸⁵And now, Watson, have you learned your lessons?"

⁴⁸⁶"At least I have tried to."

⁴⁸⁷"Good. ⁴⁸⁸You could keep up an intelligent conversation on the subject?"

⁴⁸⁹"I believe I could."

⁴⁹⁰"Then hand me that little box from the mantelpiece."

⁴⁹¹He opened the lid and took out a small object most carefully wrapped in some fine Eastern silk.

⁴⁹²This he unfolded, and disclosed a delicate little saucer of the most beautiful deep-blue colour.

⁴⁹³"It needs careful handling, Watson. ⁴⁹⁴This is the real egg-shell pottery of the Ming dynasty. ⁴⁹⁵No finer piece ever passed through Christie's. ⁴⁹⁶A complete set of this would be worth a king's ransom—

in fact, it is doubtful if there is a complete set outside the imperial palace of Peking. ⁴⁹⁷The sight of this would drive a real connoisseur wild.”

⁴⁹⁸“What am I to do with it?”

⁴⁹⁹Holmes handed me a card upon which was printed: ⁵⁰⁰“Dr. Hill Barton, 369 Half Moon Street.”

⁵⁰¹“That is your name for the evening, Watson. ⁵⁰²You will call upon Baron Gruner. ⁵⁰³I know something of his habits, and at half-past eight he would probably be disengaged. ⁵⁰⁴A note will tell him in advance that you are about to call, and you will say that you are bringing him a specimen of an absolutely unique set of Ming china. ⁵⁰⁵You may as well be a medical man, since that is a part which you can play without duplicity. ⁵⁰⁶You are a collector, this set has come your way, you have heard of the Baron's interest in the subject, and you are not averse to selling at a price.”

⁵⁰⁷“What price?”

⁵⁰⁸“Well asked, Watson. ⁵⁰⁹You would certainly fall down badly if you did not know the value of your own wares. ⁵¹⁰This saucer was got for me by Sir James, and comes, I understand, from the collection of his client. ⁵¹¹You will not exaggerate if you say that it could hardly be matched in the world.”

⁵¹²“I could perhaps suggest that the set should be valued by an expert.”

⁵¹³“Excellent, Watson! ⁵¹⁴You scintillate to-day. ⁵¹⁵Suggest Christie or Sotheby. ⁵¹⁶Your delicacy prevents your putting a price for yourself.”

⁵¹⁷“But if he won't see me?”

⁵¹⁸“Oh, yes, he will see you. ⁵¹⁹He has the collection mania in its most acute form—and especially on this subject, on which he is an acknowledged authority. ⁵²⁰Sit down, Watson, and I will dictate the letter. ⁵²¹No answer needed. ⁵²²You will merely say that you are coming, and why.”

⁵²³It was an admirable document, short, courteous, and stimulating to the curiosity of the connoisseur. ⁵²⁴A district messenger was duly dispatched with it. ⁵²⁵On the same evening, with the precious saucer in my hand and the card of Dr. Hill Barton in my pocket, I set off on my own adventure.

⁵²⁶The beautiful house and grounds indicated that Baron Gruner was, as Sir James had said, a man of considerable wealth. ⁵²⁷A long winding drive, with banks of rare shrubs on either side, opened out into a great gravelled square adorned with statues. ⁵²⁸The place had been built by a South African gold king in the days of the great boom, and the long, low house with the turrets at the corners, though an architectural nightmare, was imposing in its size and solidity. ⁵²⁹A butler, who would have adorned a bench of bishops, showed me in and handed me over to a plush-clad footman, who ushered me into the Baron's presence.

⁵³⁰He was standing at the open front of a great case which stood between the windows and which contained part of his Chinese collection. ⁵³¹He turned as I entered with a small brown vase in his hand.

⁵³²“Pray sit down, Doctor,” said he. ⁵³³“I was looking over my own treasures and wondering whether I could really afford to add to them. ⁵³⁴This little Tang specimen, which dates from the seventh century, would probably interest you. ⁵³⁵I am sure you never saw finer workmanship or a richer glaze. ⁵³⁶Have you the Ming saucer with you of which you spoke?”

⁵³⁷I carefully unpacked it and handed it to him. ⁵³⁸He seated himself at his desk, pulled over the lamp, for it was growing dark, and set himself to examine it. ⁵³⁹As he did so the yellow light beat upon his own features, and I was able to study them at my ease.

⁵⁴⁰He was certainly a remarkably handsome man. ⁵⁴¹His European reputation for beauty was fully deserved. ⁵⁴²In figure he was not more than of middle size, but was built upon graceful and active lines.

⁵⁴³His face was swarthy, almost Oriental, with large, dark, languorous eyes which might easily hold an irresistible fascination for women. ⁵⁴⁴His hair and moustache were raven black, the latter short, pointed, and carefully waxed. ⁵⁴⁵His features were regular and pleasing, save only his straight, thin-lipped mouth. ⁵⁴⁶If ever I saw a murderer's mouth it was there—a cruel, hard gash in the face, compressed, inexorable, and terrible. ⁵⁴⁷He was ill-advised to train his moustache away from it, for it was Nature's danger-signal, set as a warning to his victims. ⁵⁴⁸His voice was engaging and his manners perfect. ⁵⁴⁹In age I should have put him at little over thirty, though his record afterwards showed that he was forty-two.

⁵⁵⁰“Very fine—very fine indeed!” he said at last. ⁵⁵¹“And you say you have a set of six to correspond. ⁵⁵²What puzzles me is that I should not have heard of such magnificent specimens. ⁵⁵³I only know of one in England to match this, and it is certainly not likely to be in the market. ⁵⁵⁴Would it be indiscreet if I were to ask you, Dr. Hill Barton, how you obtained this?”

⁵⁵⁵“Does it really matter?” I asked with as careless an air as I could muster. ⁵⁵⁶“You can see that the piece is genuine, and, as to the value, I am content to take an expert's valuation.”

⁵⁵⁷“Very mysterious,” said he with a quick, suspicious flash of his dark eyes. ⁵⁵⁸“In dealing with objects of such value, one naturally wishes to know all about the transaction. ⁵⁵⁹That the piece is genuine is certain. ⁵⁶⁰I have no doubts at all about that. ⁵⁶¹But suppose—I am bound to take every possibility into account—that it should prove afterwards that you had no right to sell?”

⁵⁶²“I would guarantee you against any claim of the sort.”

⁵⁶³“That, of course, would open up the question as to what your guarantee was worth.”

⁵⁶⁴“My bankers would answer that.”

⁵⁶⁵“Quite so. ⁵⁶⁶And yet the whole transaction strikes me as rather unusual.”

⁵⁶⁷“You can do business or not,” said I with indifference. ⁵⁶⁸“I have given you the first offer as I understood that you were a connoisseur, but I shall have no difficulty in other quarters.”

⁵⁶⁹“Who told you I was a connoisseur?”

⁵⁷⁰“I was aware that you had written a book upon the subject.”

⁵⁷¹“Have you read the book?”

⁵⁷²“No.”

⁵⁷³“Dear me, this becomes more and more difficult for me to understand! ⁵⁷⁴You are a connoisseur and collector with a very valuable piece in your collection, and yet you have never troubled to consult the one book which would have told you of the real meaning and value of what you held. ⁵⁷⁵How do you explain that?”

⁵⁷⁶“I am a very busy man. ⁵⁷⁷I am a doctor in practice.”

⁵⁷⁸“That is no answer. ⁵⁷⁹If a man has a hobby he follows it up, whatever his other pursuits may be. ⁵⁸⁰You said in your note that you were a connoisseur.”

⁵⁸¹“So I am.”

⁵⁸²“Might I ask you a few questions to test you? ⁵⁸³I am obliged to tell you, Doctor—if you are indeed a doctor—that the incident becomes more and more suspicious. ⁵⁸⁴I would ask you what do you know of the Emperor Shomu and how do you associate him with the Shoso-in near Nara? ⁵⁸⁵Dear me, does that puzzle you? ⁵⁸⁶Tell me a little about the Northern Wei dynasty and its place in the history of ceramics.”

⁵⁸⁷I sprang from my chair in simulated anger.

⁵⁸⁸“This is intolerable, sir,” said I. ⁵⁸⁹“I came here to do you a favour, and not to be examined as if I were a schoolboy. ⁵⁹⁰My knowledge on these subjects may be second only to your own, but I certainly shall not answer questions which have been put in so offensive a way.”

⁵⁹¹He looked at me steadily. ⁵⁹²The languor had gone from his eyes. ⁵⁹³They suddenly glared. ⁵⁹⁴There was a gleam of teeth from between those cruel lips.

⁵⁹⁵“What is the game? ⁵⁹⁶You are here as a spy. ⁵⁹⁷You are an emissary of Holmes. ⁵⁹⁸This is a trick that you are playing upon me. ⁵⁹⁹The fellow is dying I hear, so he sends his tools to keep watch upon me. ⁶⁰⁰You’ve made your way in here without leave, and, by God! you may find it harder to get out than to get in.”

⁶⁰¹He had sprung to his feet, and I stepped back, bracing myself for an attack, for the man was beside himself with rage. ⁶⁰²He may have suspected me from the first; certainly this cross-examination had shown him the truth; but it was clear that I could not hope to deceive him. ⁶⁰³He dived his hand into a side-drawer and rummaged furiously. ⁶⁰⁴Then something struck upon his ear, for he stood listening intently.

⁶⁰⁴“Ah!” he cried. ⁶⁰⁵“Ah!” and dashed into the room behind him.

⁶⁰⁶Two steps took me to the open door, and my mind will ever carry a clear picture of the scene within. ⁶⁰⁷The window leading out to the garden was wide open. ⁶⁰⁸Beside it, looking like some terrible ghost, his head girt with bloody bandages, his face drawn and white, stood Sherlock Holmes. ⁶⁰⁹The next instant he was through the gap, and I heard the crash of his body among the laurel bushes outside. ⁶¹⁰With a howl of rage the master of the house rushed after him to the open window.

⁶¹¹And then! ⁶¹²It was done in an instant, and yet I clearly saw it. ⁶¹³An arm—a woman’s arm—shot out from among the leaves. ⁶¹⁴At the same instant the Baron uttered a horrible cry—a yell which will always ring in my memory. ⁶¹⁵He clapped his two hands to his face and rushed round the room, beating his head horribly against the walls. ⁶¹⁶Then he fell upon the carpet, rolling and writhing, while scream after scream resounded through the house.

⁶¹⁷“Water! ⁶¹⁸For God’s sake, water!” was his cry.

⁶¹⁹I seized a carafe from a side-table and rushed to his aid. ⁶²⁰At the same moment the butler and several footmen ran in from the hall. ⁶²¹I remember that one of them fainted as I knelt by the injured man and turned that awful face to the light of the lamp. ⁶²²The vitriol was eating into it everywhere and dripping from the ears and the chin. ⁶²³One eye was already white and glazed. ⁶²⁴The other was red and inflamed. ⁶²⁵The features which I had admired a few minutes before were now like some beautiful painting over which the artist has passed a wet and foul sponge. ⁶²⁶They were blurred, discoloured, inhuman, terrible.

⁶²⁷In a few words I explained exactly what had occurred, so far as the vitriol attack was concerned. ⁶²⁸Some had climbed through the window and others had rushed out on to the lawn, but it was dark and it had begun to rain. ⁶²⁹Between his screams the victim raged and raved against the avenger. ⁶³⁰“It was that hell-cat, Kitty Winter!” he cried. ⁶³¹“Oh, the she-devil! ⁶³²She shall pay for it! ⁶³³She shall pay! ⁶³⁴Oh, God in heaven, this pain is more than I can bear!”

⁶³⁵I bathed his face in oil, put cotton wadding on the raw surfaces, and administered a hypodermic of morphia. ⁶³⁶All suspicion of me had passed from his mind in the presence of this shock, and he clung to my hands as if I might have the power even yet to clear those dead-fish eyes which gazed up at me. ⁶³⁷I could have wept over the ruin had I not remembered very clearly the vile life which had led up to so hideous a change. ⁶³⁸It was loathsome to feel the pawing of his burning hands, and I was relieved when his family surgeon, closely followed by a specialist, came to relieve me of my charge. ⁶³⁹An

inspector of police had also arrived, and to him I handed my real card. ⁶⁴⁰It would have been useless as well as foolish to do otherwise, for I was nearly as well known by sight at the Yard as Holmes himself. ⁶⁴¹Then I left that house of gloom and terror. ⁶⁴²Within an hour I was at Baker Street.

⁶⁴³Holmes was seated in his familiar chair, looking very pale and exhausted. ⁶⁴⁴Apart from his injuries, even his iron nerves had been shocked by the events of the evening, and he listened with horror to my account of the Baron's transformation.

⁶⁴⁵"The wages of sin, Watson—the wages of sin!" said he. ⁶⁴⁶"Sooner or later it will always come. ⁶⁴⁷God knows, there was sin enough," he added, taking up a brown volume from the table. ⁶⁴⁸"Here is the book the woman talked of. ⁶⁴⁹If this will not break off the marriage, nothing ever could. ⁶⁵⁰But it will, Watson. ⁶⁵¹It must. ⁶⁵²No self-respecting woman could stand it."

⁶⁵³"It is his love diary?"

⁶⁵⁴"Or his lust diary. ⁶⁵⁵Call it what you will. ⁶⁵⁶The moment the woman told us of it I realized what a tremendous weapon was there if we could but lay our hands on it. ⁶⁵⁷I said nothing at the time to indicate my thoughts, for this woman might have given it away. ⁶⁵⁸But I brooded over it. ⁶⁵⁹Then this assault upon me gave me the chance of letting the Baron think that no precautions need be taken against me. ⁶⁶⁰That was all to the good. ⁶⁶¹I would have waited a little longer, but his visit to America forced my hand. ⁶⁶²He would never have left so compromising a document behind him. ⁶⁶³Therefore we had to act at once. ⁶⁶⁴Burglary at night is impossible. ⁶⁶⁵He takes precautions. ⁶⁶⁶But there was a chance in the evening if I could only be sure that his attention was engaged. ⁶⁶⁷That was where you and your blue saucer came in. ⁶⁶⁸But I had to be sure of the position of the book, and I knew I had only a few minutes in which to act, for my time was limited by your knowledge of Chinese pottery. ⁶⁶⁹Therefore I gathered the girl up at the last moment. ⁶⁷⁰How could I guess what the little packet was that she carried so carefully under her cloak? ⁶⁷¹I thought she had come altogether on my business, but it seems she had some of her own."

⁶⁷²"He guessed I came from you."

⁶⁷³"I feared he would. ⁶⁷⁴But you held him in play just long enough for me to get the book, though not long enough for an unobserved escape. ⁶⁷⁵Ah, Sir James, I am very glad you have come!"

⁶⁷⁶Our courtly friend had appeared in answer to a previous summons. ⁶⁷⁷He listened with the deepest attention to Holmes's account of what had occurred.

⁶⁷⁸"You have done wonders—wonders!" he cried when he had heard the narrative. ⁶⁷⁹"But if these injuries are as terrible as Dr. Watson describes, then surely our purpose of thwarting the marriage is sufficiently gained without the use of this horrible book."

⁶⁸⁰Holmes shook his head.

⁶⁸¹"Women of the De Merville type do not act like that. ⁶⁸²She would love him the more as a disfigured martyr. ⁶⁸³No, no. ⁶⁸⁴It is his moral side, not his physical, which we have to destroy. ⁶⁸⁵That book will bring her back to earth—and I know nothing else that could. ⁶⁸⁶It is in his own writing. ⁶⁸⁷She cannot get past it."

⁶⁸⁸Sir James carried away both it and the precious saucer. ⁶⁸⁹As I was myself overdue, I went down with him into the street. ⁶⁹⁰A brougham was waiting for him. ⁶⁹¹He sprang in, gave a hurried order to the cockaded coachman, and drove swiftly away. ⁶⁹²He flung his overcoat half out of the window to cover the armorial bearings upon the panel, but I had seen them in the glare of our fanlight none the less. ⁶⁹³I gasped with surprise. ⁶⁹⁴Then I turned back and ascended the stair to Holmes's room.

⁶⁹⁵"I have found out who our client is," I cried, bursting with my great news. ⁶⁹⁶"Why, Holmes, it is—"

⁶⁹⁷“It is a loyal friend and a chivalrous gentleman,” said Holmes, holding up a restraining hand. ⁶⁹⁸“Let that now and forever be enough for us.”

⁶⁹⁹I do not know how the incriminating book was used. ⁷⁰⁰Sir James may have managed it. ⁷⁰¹Or it is more probable that so delicate a task was entrusted to the young lady's father. ⁷⁰²The effect, at any rate, was all that could be desired. ⁷⁰³Three days later appeared a paragraph in the Morning Post to say that the marriage between Baron Adelbert Gruner and Miss Violet de Merville would not take place. ⁷⁰⁴The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. ⁷⁰⁵Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered, was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. ⁷⁰⁶Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. ⁷⁰⁷My friend has not yet stood in the dock.

The Blanched Soldier

¹The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious. ²For a long time he has worried me to write an experience of my own. ³Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures. ⁴“Try it yourself, Holmes!” he has retorted, and I am compelled to admit that, having taken my pen in my hand, I do begin to realize that the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader. ⁵The following case can hardly fail to do so, as it is among the strangest happenings in my collection, though it chanced that Watson had no note of it in his collection. ⁶Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances. ⁷A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.

⁸I find from my notebook that it was in January, 1903, just after the conclusion of the Boer War, that I had my visit from Mr. James M. Dodd, a big, fresh, sunburned, upstanding Briton. ⁹The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. ¹⁰I was alone.

¹¹It is my habit to sit with my back to the window and to place my visitors in the opposite chair, where the light falls full upon them. ¹²Mr. James M. Dodd seemed somewhat at a loss how to begin the interview. ¹³I did not attempt to help him, for his silence gave me more time for observation. ¹⁴I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power, and so I gave him some of my conclusions.

¹⁵“From South Africa, sir, I perceive.”

¹⁶“Yes, sir,” he answered, with some surprise.

¹⁷“Imperial Yeomanry, I fancy.”

¹⁸“Exactly.”

¹⁹“Middlesex Corps, no doubt.”

²⁰“That is so. ²¹Mr. Holmes, you are a wizard.”

²²I smiled at his bewildered expression.

²³“When a gentleman of virile appearance enters my room with such tan upon his face as an English sun could never give, and with his handkerchief in his sleeve instead of in his pocket, it is not difficult to place him. ²⁴You wear a short beard, which shows that you were not a regular. ²⁵You have the cut of a riding-man. ²⁶As to Middlesex, your card has already shown me that you are a stockbroker from Throgmorton Street. ²⁷What other regiment would you join?”

²⁸“You see everything.”

²⁹“I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see. ³⁰However, Mr. Dodd, it was not to discuss the science of observation that you called upon me this morning. ³¹What has been happening at Tuxbury Old Park?”

³²“Mr. Holmes—!”

³³“My dear sir, there is no mystery. ³⁴Your letter came with that heading, and as you fixed this appointment in very pressing terms it was clear that something sudden and important had occurred.”

³⁵“Yes, indeed. ³⁶But the letter was written in the afternoon, and a good deal has happened since then.

³⁷If Colonel Emsworth had not kicked me out—”

³⁸“Kicked you out!”

³⁹“Well, that was what it amounted to. ⁴⁰He is a hard nail, is Colonel Emsworth. ⁴¹The greatest martinet in the Army in his day, and it was a day of rough language, too. ⁴²I couldn't have stuck the colonel if it had not been for Godfrey's sake.”

⁴³I lit my pipe and leaned back in my chair.

⁴⁴“Perhaps you will explain what you are talking about.”

⁴⁵My client grinned mischievously.

⁴⁶“I had got into the way of supposing that you knew everything without being told,” said he. ⁴⁷“But I will give you the facts, and I hope to God that you will be able to tell me what they mean. ⁴⁸I've been awake all night puzzling my brain, and the more I think the more incredible does it become.

⁴⁹“When I joined up in January, 1901—just two years ago—young Godfrey Emsworth had joined the same squadron. ⁵⁰He was Colonel Emsworth's only son—Emsworth, the Crimean V. C.—and he had the fighting blood in him, so it is no wonder he volunteered. ⁵¹There was not a finer lad in the regiment. ⁵²We formed a friendship—the sort of friendship which can only be made when one lives the same life and shares the same joys and sorrows. ⁵³He was my mate—and that means a good deal in the Army. ⁵⁴We took the rough and the smooth together for a year of hard fighting. ⁵⁵Then he was hit with a bullet from an elephant gun in the action near Diamond Hill outside Pretoria. ⁵⁶I got one letter from the hospital at Cape Town and one from Southampton. ⁵⁷Since then not a word—not one word, Mr. Holmes, for six months and more, and he my closest pal.

⁵⁸“Well, when the war was over, and we all got back, I wrote to his father and asked where Godfrey was. ⁵⁹No answer. ⁶⁰I waited a bit and then I wrote again. ⁶¹This time I had a reply, short and gruff. ⁶²Godfrey had gone on a voyage round the world, and it was not likely that he would be back for a year. ⁶³That was all.

⁶⁴“I wasn't satisfied, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁵The whole thing seemed to me so damned unnatural. ⁶⁶He was a good lad, and he would not drop a pal like that. ⁶⁷It was not like him. ⁶⁸Then, again, I happened to know that he was heir to a lot of money, and also that his father and he did not always hit it off too well. ⁶⁹The old man was sometimes a bully, and young Godfrey had too much spirit to stand it. ⁷⁰No, I wasn't satisfied, and I determined that I would get to the root of the matter. ⁷¹It happened, however, that my own affairs needed a lot of straightening out, after two years' absence, and so it is only this week that I have been able to take up Godfrey's case again. ⁷²But since I have taken it up I mean to drop everything in order to see it through.”

⁷³Mr. James M. Dodd appeared to be the sort of person whom it would be better to have as a friend than as an enemy. ⁷⁴His blue eyes were stern and his square jaw had set hard as he spoke.

⁷⁵“Well, what have you done?” I asked.

⁷⁶“My first move was to get down to his home, Tuxbury Old Park, near Bedford, and to see for myself how the ground lay. ⁷⁷I wrote to the mother, therefore—I had had quite enough of the curmudgeon of a father—and I made a clean frontal attack: ⁷⁸Godfrey was my chum, I had a great deal of interest which I might tell her of our common experiences, I should be in the neighbourhood, would there be any

objection, et cetera? ⁷⁹In reply I had quite an amiable answer from her and an offer to put me up for the night. ⁸⁰That was what took me down on Monday.

⁸¹“Tuxbury Old Hall is inaccessible—five miles from anywhere. ⁸²There was no trap at the station, so I had to walk, carrying my suitcase, and it was nearly dark before I arrived. ⁸³It is a great wandering house, standing in a considerable park. ⁸⁴I should judge it was of all sorts of ages and styles, starting on a half-timbered Elizabethan foundation and ending in a Victorian portico. ⁸⁵Inside it was all panelling and tapestry and half-effaced old pictures, a house of shadows and mystery. ⁸⁶There was a butler, old Ralph, who seemed about the same age as the house, and there was his wife, who might have been older. ⁸⁷She had been Godfrey's nurse, and I had heard him speak of her as second only to his mother in his affections, so I was drawn to her in spite of her queer appearance. ⁸⁸The mother I liked also—a gentle little white mouse of a woman. ⁸⁹It was only the colonel himself whom I barred.

⁹⁰“We had a bit of barney right away, and I should have walked back to the station if I had not felt that it might be playing his game for me to do so. ⁹¹I was shown straight into his study, and there I found him, a huge, bow-backed man with a smoky skin and a straggling gray beard, seated behind his littered desk. ⁹²A red-veined nose jutted out like a vulture's beak, and two fierce gray eyes glared at me from under tufted brows. ⁹³I could understand now why Godfrey seldom spoke of his father.

⁹⁴“Well, sir,” said he in a rasping voice, ‘I should be interested to know the real reasons for this visit.’

⁹⁵“I answered that I had explained them in my letter to his wife.

⁹⁶“Yes, yes, you said that you had known Godfrey in Africa. ⁹⁷We have, of course, only your word for that.’

⁹⁸“I have his letters to me in my pocket.’

⁹⁹“Kindly let me see them.’

¹⁰⁰“He glanced at the two which I handed him, and then he tossed them back.

¹⁰¹“Well, what then?’ he asked.

¹⁰²“I was fond of your son Godfrey, sir. ¹⁰³Many ties and memories united us. ¹⁰⁴Is it not natural that I should wonder at his sudden silence and should wish to know what has become of him?’

¹⁰⁵“I have some recollections, sir, that I had already corresponded with you and had told you what had become of him. ¹⁰⁶He has gone upon a voyage round the world. ¹⁰⁷His health was in a poor way after his African experiences, and both his mother and I were of opinion that complete rest and change were needed. ¹⁰⁸Kindly pass that explanation on to any other friends who may be interested in the matter.’

¹⁰⁹“Certainly,’ I answered. ¹¹⁰“But perhaps you would have the goodness to let me have the name of the steamer and of the line by which he sailed, together with the date. ¹¹¹I have no doubt that I should be able to get a letter through to him.’

¹¹²“My request seemed both to puzzle and to irritate my host. ¹¹³His great eyebrows came down over his eyes, and he tapped his fingers impatiently on the table. ¹¹⁴He looked up at last with the expression of one who has seen his adversary make a dangerous move at chess, and has decided how to meet it.

¹¹⁵“Many people, Mr. Dodd,’ said he, ‘would take offence at your infernal pertinacity and would think that this insistence had reached the point of damned impertinence.’

¹¹⁶“You must put it down, sir, to my real love for your son.’

¹¹⁷“Exactly. ¹¹⁸I have already made every allowance upon that score. ¹¹⁹I must ask you, however, to drop these inquiries. ¹²⁰Every family has its own inner knowledge and its own motives, which cannot

always be made clear to outsiders, however well-intentioned. ¹²¹My wife is anxious to hear something of Godfrey's past which you are in a position to tell her, but I would ask you to let the present and the future alone. ¹²²Such inquiries serve no useful purpose, sir, and place us in a delicate and difficult position.'

¹²³"So I came to a dead end, Mr. Holmes. ¹²⁴There was no getting past it. ¹²⁵I could only pretend to accept the situation and register a vow inwardly that I would never rest until my friend's fate had been cleared up. ¹²⁶It was a dull evening. ¹²⁷We dined quietly, the three of us, in a gloomy, faded old room. ¹²⁸The lady questioned me eagerly about her son, but the old man seemed morose and depressed. ¹²⁹I was so bored by the whole proceeding that I made an excuse as soon as I decently could and retired to my bedroom. ¹³⁰It was a large, bare room on the ground floor, as gloomy as the rest of the house, but after a year of sleeping upon the veldt, Mr. Holmes, one is not too particular about one's quarters. ¹³¹I opened the curtains and looked out into the garden, remarking that it was a fine night with a bright half-moon. ¹³²Then I sat down by the roaring fire with the lamp on a table beside me, and endeavoured to distract my mind with a novel. ¹³³I was interrupted, however, by Ralph, the old butler, who came in with a fresh supply of coals.

¹³⁴"I thought you might run short in the night-time, sir. ¹³⁵It is bitter weather and these rooms are cold.'

¹³⁶"He hesitated before leaving the room, and when I looked round he was standing facing me with a wistful look upon his wrinkled face.

¹³⁷"Beg your pardon, sir, but I could not help hearing what you said of young Master Godfrey at dinner. ¹³⁸You know, sir, that my wife nursed him, and so I may say I am his foster-father. ¹³⁹It's natural we should take an interest. ¹⁴⁰And you say he carried himself well, sir?'

¹⁴¹"There was no braver man in the regiment. ¹⁴²He pulled me out once from under the rifles of the Boers, or maybe I should not be here.'

¹⁴³"The old butler rubbed his skinny hands.

¹⁴⁴"Yes, sir, yes, that is Master Godfrey all over. ¹⁴⁵He was always courageous. ¹⁴⁶There's not a tree in the park, sir, that he has not climbed. ¹⁴⁷Nothing would stop him. ¹⁴⁸He was a fine boy—and oh, sir, he was a fine man.'

¹⁴⁸"I sprang to my feet.

¹⁴⁹"Look here!' I cried. ¹⁵⁰You say he was. ¹⁵¹You speak as if he were dead. ¹⁵²What is all this mystery? ¹⁵³What has become of Godfrey Emsworth?'

¹⁵⁴"I gripped the old man by the shoulder, but he shrank away.

¹⁵⁵"I don't know what you mean, sir. ¹⁵⁶Ask the master about Master Godfrey. ¹⁵⁷He knows. ¹⁵⁸It is not for me to interfere.'

¹⁵⁹"He was leaving the room, but I held his arm.

¹⁶⁰"Listen,' I said. ¹⁶¹You are going to answer one question before you leave if I have to hold you all night. ¹⁶²Is Godfrey dead?'

¹⁶³"He could not face my eyes. ¹⁶⁴He was like a man hypnotized. ¹⁶⁵The answer was dragged from his lips. ¹⁶⁶It was a terrible and unexpected one.

¹⁶⁷"I wish to God he was!' he cried, and, tearing himself free, he dashed from the room.

¹⁶⁸"You will think, Mr. Holmes, that I returned to my chair in no very happy state of mind. ¹⁶⁹The old man's words seemed to me to bear only one interpretation. ¹⁷⁰Clearly my poor friend had become

involved in some criminal or, at the least, disreputable transaction which touched the family honour. ¹⁷¹That stern old man had sent his son away and hidden him from the world lest some scandal should come to light. ¹⁷²Godfrey was a reckless fellow. ¹⁷³He was easily influenced by those around him. ¹⁷⁴No doubt he had fallen into bad hands and been misled to his ruin. ¹⁷⁵It was a piteous business, if it was indeed so, but even now it was my duty to hunt him out and see if I could aid him. ¹⁷⁶I was anxiously pondering the matter when I looked up, and there was Godfrey Emsworth standing before me.”

¹⁷⁷My client had paused as one in deep emotion.

¹⁷⁸“Pray continue,” I said. ¹⁷⁹“Your problem presents some very unusual features.”

¹⁸⁰“He was outside the window, Mr. Holmes, with his face pressed against the glass. ¹⁸¹I have told you that I looked out at the night. ¹⁸²When I did so I left the curtains partly open. ¹⁸³His figure was framed in this gap. ¹⁸⁴The window came down to the ground and I could see the whole length of it, but it was his face which held my gaze. ¹⁸⁵He was deadly pale—never have I seen a man so white. ¹⁸⁶I reckon ghosts may look like that; but his eyes met mine, and they were the eyes of a living man. ¹⁸⁷He sprang back when he saw that I was looking at him, and he vanished into the darkness.

¹⁸⁸“There was something shocking about the man, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁸⁹It wasn't merely that ghastly face glimmering as white as cheese in the darkness. ¹⁹⁰It was more subtle than that—something slinking, something furtive, something guilty— something very unlike the frank, manly lad that I had known. ¹⁹¹It left a feeling of horror in my mind.

¹⁹²“But when a man has been soldiering for a year or two with brother Boer as a playmate, he keeps his nerve and acts quickly. ¹⁹³Godfrey had hardly vanished before I was at the window. ¹⁹⁴There was an awkward catch, and I was some little time before I could throw it up. ¹⁹⁵Then I nipped through and ran down the garden path in the direction that I thought he might have taken.

¹⁹⁶“It was a long path and the light was not very good, but it seemed to me something was moving ahead of me. ¹⁹⁷I ran on and called his name, but it was no use. ¹⁹⁸When I got to the end of the path there were several others branching in different directions to various outhouses. ¹⁹⁹I stood hesitating, and as I did so I heard distinctly the sound of a closing door. ²⁰⁰It was not behind me in the house, but ahead of me, somewhere in the darkness. ²⁰¹That was enough, Mr. Holmes, to assure me that what I had seen was not a vision. ²⁰²Godfrey had run away from me, and he had shut a door behind him. ²⁰³Of that I was certain.

²⁰⁴“There was nothing more I could do, and I spent an uneasy night turning the matter over in my mind and trying to find some theory which would cover the facts. ²⁰⁵Next day I found the colonel rather more conciliatory, and as his wife remarked that there were some places of interest in the neighbourhood, it gave me an opening to ask whether my presence for one more night would incommode them. ²⁰⁶A somewhat grudging acquiescence from the old man gave me a clear day in which to make my observations. ²⁰⁷I was already perfectly convinced that Godfrey was in hiding somewhere near, but where and why remained to be solved.

²⁰⁸“The house was so large and so rambling that a regiment might be hid away in it and no one the wiser. ²⁰⁹If the secret lay there it was difficult for me to penetrate it. ²¹⁰But the door which I had heard close was certainly not in the house. ²¹¹I must explore the garden and see what I could find. ²¹²There was no difficulty in the way, for the old people were busy in their own fashion and left me to my own devices.

²¹³“There were several small outhouses, but at the end of the garden there was a detached building of some size—large enough for a gardener's or a gamekeeper's residence. ²¹⁴Could this be the place whence the sound of that shutting door had come? ²¹⁵I approached it in a careless fashion as though I were strolling aimlessly round the grounds. ²¹⁶As I did so, a small, brisk, bearded man in a black coat and bowler hat—not at all the gardener type—came out of the door. ²¹⁷To my surprise, he locked it after him and put the key in his pocket. ²¹⁸Then he looked at me with some surprise on his face.

²¹⁹“‘Are you a visitor here?’ he asked.

²²⁰“I explained that I was and that I was a friend of Godfrey’s.

²²¹“‘What a pity that he should be away on his travels, for he would have so liked to see me,’ I continued.

²²²“‘Quite so. ²²³Exactly,’ said he with a rather guilty air. ²²⁴‘No doubt you will renew your visit at some more propitious time.’ ²²⁵He passed on, but when I turned I observed that he was standing watching me, half-concealed by the laurels at the far end of the garden.

²²⁶“I had a good look at the little house as I passed it, but the windows were heavily curtained, and, so far as one could see, it was empty. ²²⁷I might spoil my own game and even be ordered off the premises if I were too audacious, for I was still conscious that I was being watched. ²²⁸Therefore, I strolled back to the house and waited for night before I went on with my inquiry. ²²⁹When all was dark and quiet I slipped out of my window and made my way as silently as possible to the mysterious lodge.

²³⁰“I have said that it was heavily curtained, but now I found that the windows were shuttered as well.

²³¹Some light, however, was breaking through one of them, so I concentrated my attention upon this.

²³²I was in luck, for the curtain had not been quite closed, and there was a crack in the shutter, so that I could see the inside of the room. ²³³It was a cheery place enough, a bright lamp and a blazing fire.

²³⁴Opposite to me was seated the little man whom I had seen in the morning. ²³⁵He was smoking a pipe and reading a paper.”

²³⁶“What paper?” I asked.

²³⁷My client seemed annoyed at the interruption of his narrative.

²³⁸“Can it matter?” he asked.

²³⁹“It is most essential.”

²⁴⁰“I really took no notice.”

²⁴¹“Possibly you observed whether it was a broad-leafed paper or of that smaller type which one associates with weeklies.”

²⁴²“Now that you mention it, it was not large. ²⁴³It might have been the Spectator. ²⁴⁴However, I had little thought to spare upon such details, for a second man was seated with his back to the window, and I could swear that this second man was Godfrey. ²⁴⁵I could not see his face, but I knew the familiar slope of his shoulders. ²⁴⁶He was leaning upon his elbow in an attitude of great melancholy, his body turned towards the fire. ²⁴⁷I was hesitating as to what I should do when there was a sharp tap on my shoulder, and there was Colonel Emsworth beside me.

²⁴⁸“‘This way, sir!’ said he in a low voice. ²⁴⁹He walked in silence to the house, and I followed him into my own bedroom. ²⁵⁰He had picked up a time-table in the hall.

²⁵¹“‘There is a train to London at 8.30,’ said he. ²⁵²‘The trap will be at the door at eight.’

²⁵³“He was white with rage, and, indeed, I felt myself in so difficult a position that I could only stammer out a few incoherent apologies in which I tried to excuse myself by urging my anxiety for my friend.

²⁵⁴“‘The matter will not bear discussion,’ said he abruptly. ²⁵⁵‘You have made a most damnable intrusion into the privacy of our family. ²⁵⁶You were here as a guest and you have become a spy. ²⁵⁷I have nothing more to say, sir, save that I have no wish ever to see you again.’

²⁵⁸“At this I lost my temper, Mr. Holmes, and I spoke with some warmth.

²⁵⁹“I have seen your son, and I am convinced that for some reason of your own you are concealing him from the world. ²⁶⁰I have no idea what your motives are in cutting him off in this fashion, but I am sure that he is no longer a free agent. ²⁶¹I warn you, Colonel Emsworth, that until I am assured as to the safety and well-being of my friend I shall never desist in my efforts to get to the bottom of the mystery, and I shall certainly not allow myself to be intimidated by anything which you may say or do.’

²⁶²“The old fellow looked diabolical, and I really thought he was about to attack me. ²⁶³I have said that he was a gaunt, fierce old giant, and though I am no weakling I might have been hard put to it to hold my own against him. ²⁶⁴However, after a long glare of rage he turned upon his heel and walked out of the room. ²⁶⁵For my part, I took the appointed train in the morning, with the full intention of coming straight to you and asking for your advice and assistance at the appointment for which I had already written.”

²⁶⁶Such was the problem which my visitor laid before me. ²⁶⁷It presented, as the astute reader will have already perceived, few difficulties in its solution, for a very limited choice of alternatives must get to the root of the matter. ²⁶⁸Still, elementary as it was, there were points of interest and novelty about it which may excuse my placing it upon record. ²⁶⁹I now proceeded, using my familiar method of logical analysis, to narrow down the possible solutions.

²⁷⁰“The servants,” I asked; “how many were in the house?”

²⁷¹“To the best of my belief there were only the old butler and his wife. ²⁷²They seemed to live in the simplest fashion.”

²⁷³“There was no servant, then, in the detached house?”

²⁷⁴“None, unless the little man with the beard acted as such. ²⁷⁵He seemed, however, to be quite a superior person.”

²⁷⁶“That seems very suggestive. ²⁷⁷Had you any indication that food was conveyed from the one house to the other?”

²⁷⁸“Now that you mention it, I did see old Ralph carrying a basket down the garden walk and going in the direction of this house. ²⁷⁹The idea of food did not occur to me at the moment.”

²⁸⁰“Did you make any local inquiries?”

²⁸¹“Yes, I did. ²⁸²I spoke to the station-master and also to the innkeeper in the village. ²⁸³I simply asked if they knew anything of my old comrade, Godfrey Emsworth. ²⁸⁴Both of them assured me that he had gone for a voyage round the world. ²⁸⁵He had come home and then had almost at once started off again. ²⁸⁶The story was evidently universally accepted.”

²⁸⁷“You said nothing of your suspicions?”

²⁸⁸“Nothing.”

²⁸⁹“That was very wise. ²⁹⁰The matter should certainly be inquired into. ²⁹¹I will go back with you to Tuxbury Old Park.”

²⁹²“To-day?”

²⁹³It happened that at the moment I was clearing up the case which my friend Watson has described as that of the Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved. ²⁹⁴I had also a commission from the Sultan of Turkey which called for immediate action, as political consequences of the gravest kind might arise from its neglect. ²⁹⁵Therefore it was not until the beginning of the next week, as my diary records, that I was able to start forth on my mission to Bedfordshire in company with

Mr. James M. Dodd. ²⁹⁶As we drove to Euston we picked up a grave and taciturn gentleman of iron-gray aspect, with whom I had made the necessary arrangements.

²⁹⁷“This is an old friend,” said I to Dodd. ²⁹⁸“It is possible that his presence may be entirely unnecessary, and, on the other hand, it may be essential. ²⁹⁹It is not necessary at the present stage to go further into the matter.”

³⁰⁰The narratives of Watson have accustomed the reader, no doubt, to the fact that I do not waste words or disclose my thoughts while a case is actually under consideration. ³⁰¹Dodd seemed surprised, but nothing more was said, and the three of us continued our journey together. ³⁰²In the train I asked Dodd one more question which I wished our companion to hear.

³⁰³“You say that you saw your friend's face quite clearly at the window, so clearly that you are sure of his identity?”

³⁰⁴“I have no doubt about it whatever. ³⁰⁵His nose was pressed against the glass. ³⁰⁶The lamplight shone full upon him.”

³⁰⁷“It could not have been someone resembling him?”

³⁰⁸“No, no, it was he.”

³⁰⁹“But you say he was changed?”

³¹⁰“Only in colour. ³¹¹His face was—how shall I describe it?—it was of a fish-belly whiteness. ³¹²It was bleached.”

³¹³“Was it equally pale all over?”

³¹⁴“I think not. ³¹⁵It was his brow which I saw so clearly as it was pressed against the window.”

³¹⁶“Did you call to him?”

³¹⁷“I was too startled and horrified for the moment. ³¹⁸Then I pursued him, as I have told you, but without result.”

³¹⁹My case was practically complete, and there was only one small incident needed to round it off. ³²⁰When, after a considerable drive, we arrived at the strange old rambling house which my client had described, it was Ralph, the elderly butler, who opened the door. ³²¹I had requisitioned the carriage for the day and had asked my elderly friend to remain within it unless we should summon him. ³²²Ralph, a little wrinkled old fellow, was in the conventional costume of black coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, with only one curious variant. ³²³He wore brown leather gloves, which at sight of us he instantly shuffled off, laying them down on the hall-table as we passed in. ³²⁴I have, as my friend Watson may have remarked, an abnormally acute set of senses, and a faint but incisive scent was apparent. ³²⁵It seemed to centre on the hall-table. ³²⁶I turned, placed my hat there, knocked it off, stooped to pick it up, and contrived to bring my nose within a foot of the gloves. ³²⁷Yes, it was undoubtedly from them that the curious tarry odour was oozing. ³²⁸I passed on into the study with my case complete. ³²⁹Alas, that I should have to show my hand so when I tell my own story! ³³⁰It was by concealing such links in the chain that Watson was enabled to produce his meretricious finales.

³³¹Colonel Emsworth was not in his room, but he came quickly enough on receipt of Ralph's message.

³³²We heard his quick, heavy step in the passage. ³³³The door was flung open and he rushed in with bristling beard and twisted features, as terrible an old man as ever I have seen. ³³⁴He held our cards in his hand, and he tore them up and stamped on the fragments.

³³⁵“Have I not told you, you infernal busybody, that you are warned off the premises? ³³⁶Never dare to show your damned face here again. ³³⁷If you enter again without my leave I shall be within my rights if

I use violence. ³³⁸I'll shoot you, sir! ³³⁹By God, I will! ³⁴⁰As to you, sir," turning upon me, "I extend the same warning to you. ³⁴¹I am familiar with your ignoble profession, but you must take your reputed talents to some other field. ³⁴²There is no opening for them here."

³⁴³"I cannot leave here," said my client firmly, "until I hear from Godfrey's own lips that he is under no restraint."

³⁴⁴Our involuntary host rang the bell.

³⁴⁵"Ralph," he said, "telephone down to the county police and ask the inspector to send up two constables. ³⁴⁶Tell him there are burglars in the house."

³⁴⁷"One moment," said I. ³⁴⁸"You must be aware, Mr. Dodd, that Colonel Emsworth is within his rights and that we have no legal status within his house. ³⁴⁹On the other hand, he should recognize that your action is prompted entirely by solicitude for his son. ³⁵⁰I venture to hope that if I were allowed to have five minutes' conversation with Colonel Emsworth I could certainly alter his view of the matter."

³⁵¹"I am not so easily altered," said the old soldier. ³⁵²"Ralph, do what I have told you. ³⁵³What the devil are you waiting for? ³⁵⁴Ring up the police!"

³⁵⁵"Nothing of the sort," I said, putting my back to the door. ³⁵⁶"Any police interference would bring about the very catastrophe which you dread." ³⁵⁷I took out my notebook and scribbled one word upon a loose sheet. ³⁵⁸"That," said I as I handed it to Colonel Emsworth, "is what has brought us here."

³⁵⁹He stared at the writing with a face from which every expression save amazement had vanished.

³⁶⁰"How do you know?" he gasped, sitting down heavily in his chair.

³⁶¹"It is my business to know things. ³⁶²That is my trade."

³⁶³He sat in deep thought, his gaunt hand tugging at his straggling beard. ³⁶⁴Then he made a gesture of resignation.

³⁶⁵"Well, if you wish to see Godfrey, you shall. ³⁶⁶It is no doing of mine, but you have forced my hand. ³⁶⁷Ralph, tell Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Kent that in five minutes we shall be with them."

³⁶⁸At the end of that time we passed down the garden path and found ourselves in front of the mystery house at the end. ³⁶⁹A small bearded man stood at the door with a look of considerable astonishment upon his face.

³⁷⁰"This is very sudden, Colonel Emsworth," said he. ³⁷¹"This will disarrange all our plans."

³⁷²"I can't help it, Mr. Kent. ³⁷³Our hands have been forced. ³⁷⁴Can Mr. Godfrey see us?"

³⁷⁵"Yes, he is waiting inside." ³⁷⁶He turned and led us into a large, plainly furnished front room. ³⁷⁷A man was standing with his back to the fire, and at the sight of him my client sprang forward with outstretched hand.

³⁷⁸"Why, Godfrey, old man, this is fine!"

³⁷⁹But the other waved him back.

³⁸⁰"Don't touch me, Jimmie. ³⁸¹Keep your distance. ³⁸²Yes, you may well stare! ³⁸³I don't quite look the smart Lance-Corporal Emsworth, of B Squadron, do I?"

³⁸⁴His appearance was certainly extraordinary. ³⁸⁵One could see that he had indeed been a handsome man with clear-cut features sunburned by an African sun, but mottled in patches over this darker surface were curious whitish patches which had bleached his skin.

³⁸⁶“That's why I don't court visitors,” said he. ³⁸⁷“I don't mind you, Jimmie, but I could have done without your friend. ³⁸⁸I suppose there is some good reason for it, but you have me at a disadvantage.”

³⁸⁹“I wanted to be sure that all was well with you, Godfrey. ³⁹⁰I saw you that night when you looked into my window, and I could not let the matter rest till I had cleared things up.”

³⁹¹“Old Ralph told me you were there, and I couldn't help taking a peep at you. ³⁹²I hoped you would not have seen me, and I had to run to my burrow when I heard the window go up.”

³⁹³“But what in heaven's name is the matter?”

³⁹⁴“Well, it's not a long story to tell,” said he, lighting a cigarette. ³⁹⁵“You remember that morning fight at Buffelsspruit, outside Pretoria, on the Eastern railway line? ³⁹⁶You heard I was hit?”

³⁹⁷“Yes, I heard that, but I never got particulars.”

³⁹⁸“Three of us got separated from the others. ³⁹⁹It was very broken country, you may remember. ⁴⁰⁰There was Simpson—the fellow we called Baldy Simpson—and Anderson, and I. ⁴⁰¹We were clearing brother Boer, but he lay low and got the three of us. ⁴⁰²The other two were killed. I got an elephant bullet through my shoulder. ⁴⁰³I stuck on to my horse, however, and he galloped several miles before I fainted and rolled off the saddle.

⁴⁰⁴“When I came to myself it was nightfall, and I raised myself up, feeling very weak and ill. ⁴⁰⁵To my surprise there was a house close beside me, a fairly large house with a broad stoep and many windows. ⁴⁰⁶It was deadly cold. ⁴⁰⁷You remember the kind of numb cold which used to come at evening, a deadly, sickening sort of cold, very different from a crisp healthy frost. ⁴⁰⁸Well, I was chilled to the bone, and my only hope seemed to lie in reaching that house. ⁴⁰⁹I staggered to my feet and dragged myself along, hardly conscious of what I did. I have a dim memory of slowly ascending the steps, entering a wide-opened door, passing into a large room which contained several beds, and throwing myself down with a gasp of satisfaction upon one of them. ⁴¹⁰It was unmade, but that troubled me not at all. ⁴¹¹I drew the clothes over my shivering body and in a moment I was in a deep sleep.

⁴¹²“It was morning when I wakened, and it seemed to me that instead of coming out into a world of sanity I had emerged into some extraordinary nightmare. ⁴¹³The African sun flooded through the big, curtainless windows, and every detail of the great, bare, whitewashed dormitory stood out hard and clear. ⁴¹⁴In front of me was standing a small, dwarf-like man with a huge, bulbous head, who was jabbering excitedly in Dutch, waving two horrible hands which looked to me like brown sponges. ⁴¹⁵Behind him stood a group of people who seemed to be intensely amused by the situation, but a chill came over me as I looked at them. ⁴¹⁶Not one of them was a normal human being. ⁴¹⁷Every one was twisted or swollen or disfigured in some strange way. ⁴¹⁸The laughter of these strange monstrosities was a dreadful thing to hear.

⁴¹⁹“It seemed that none of them could speak English, but the situation wanted clearing up, for the creature with the big head was growing furiously angry, and, uttering wild-beast cries, he had laid his deformed hands upon me and was dragging me out of bed, regardless of the fresh flow of blood from my wound. ⁴²⁰The little monster was as strong as a bull, and I don't know what he might have done to me had not an elderly man who was clearly in authority been attracted to the room by the hubbub. ⁴²¹He said a few stern words in Dutch, and my persecutor shrank away. ⁴²²Then he turned upon me, gazing at me in the utmost amazement.

⁴²³“‘How in the world did you come here?’ he asked in amazement. ⁴²⁴‘Wait a bit! ⁴²⁵I see that you are tired out and that wounded shoulder of yours wants looking after. ⁴²⁶I am a doctor, and I'll soon have you tied up. ⁴²⁷But, man alive! you are in far greater danger here than ever you were on the battlefield. ⁴²⁸You are in the Leper Hospital, and you have slept in a leper's bed.’

⁴²⁹“Need I tell you more, Jimmie? ⁴³⁰It seems that in view of the approaching battle all these poor creatures had been evacuated the day before. ⁴³¹Then, as the British advanced, they had been brought back by this, their medical superintendent, who assured me that, though he believed he was immune to the disease, he would none the less never have dared to do what I had done. ⁴³²He put me in a private room, treated me kindly, and within a week or so I was removed to the general hospital at Pretoria.

⁴³³“So there you have my tragedy. ⁴³⁴I hoped against hope, but it was not until I had reached home that the terrible signs which you see upon my face told me that I had not escaped. ⁴³⁵What was I to do? ⁴³⁶I was in this lonely house. ⁴³⁷We had two servants whom we could utterly trust. ⁴³⁸There was a house where I could live. ⁴³⁹Under pledge of secrecy, Mr. Kent, who is a surgeon, was prepared to stay with me. ⁴⁴⁰It seemed simple enough on those lines. ⁴⁴¹The alternative was a dreadful one—segregation for life among strangers with never a hope of release. ⁴⁴²But absolute secrecy was necessary, or even in this quiet countryside there would have been an outcry, and I should have been dragged to my horrible doom. ⁴⁴³Even you, Jimmie—even you had to be kept in the dark. ⁴⁴⁴Why my father has relented I cannot imagine.”

⁴⁴⁵Colonel Emsworth pointed to me.

⁴⁴⁶“This is the gentleman who forced my hand.” ⁴⁴⁷He unfolded the scrap of paper on which I had written the word “Leprosy.” ⁴⁴⁸“It seemed to me that if he knew so much as that it was safer that he should know all.”

⁴⁴⁹“And so it was,” said I. ⁴⁵⁰“Who knows but good may come of it? ⁴⁵¹I understand that only Mr. Kent has seen the patient. ⁴⁵²May I ask, sir, if you are an authority on such complaints, which are, I understand, tropical or semi-tropical in their nature?”

⁴⁵³“I have the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man,” he observed with some stiffness.

⁴⁵⁴“I have no doubt, sir, that you are fully competent, but I am sure that you will agree that in such a case a second opinion is valuable. ⁴⁵⁵You have avoided this, I understand, for fear that pressure should be put upon you to segregate the patient.”

⁴⁵⁶“That is so,” said Colonel Emsworth.

⁴⁵⁷“I foresaw this situation,” I explained, “and I have brought with me a friend whose discretion may absolutely be trusted. ⁴⁵⁸I was able once to do him a professional service, and he is ready to advise as a friend rather than as a specialist. ⁴⁵⁹His name is Sir James Saunders.”

⁴⁶⁰The prospect of an interview with Lord Roberts would not have excited greater wonder and pleasure in a raw subaltern than was now reflected upon the face of Mr. Kent.

⁴⁶¹“I shall indeed be proud,” he murmured.

⁴⁶²“Then I will ask Sir James to step this way. ⁴⁶³He is at present in the carriage outside the door. ⁴⁶⁴Meanwhile, Colonel Emsworth, we may perhaps assemble in your study, where I could give the necessary explanations.”

⁴⁶⁵And here it is that I miss my Watson. ⁴⁶⁶By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systematized common sense, into a prodigy. ⁴⁶⁷When I tell my own story I have no such aid. ⁴⁶⁸And yet I will give my process of thought even as I gave it to my small audience, which included Godfrey's mother in the study of Colonel Emsworth.

⁴⁶⁹“That process,” said I, “starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. ⁴⁷⁰It may well be that several explanations remain, in which case one tries test after test until one or other of them has a convincing amount of support. ⁴⁷¹We will now apply this principle to the case in point. ⁴⁷²As it was first presented

to me, there were three possible explanations of the seclusion or incarceration of this gentleman in an outhouse of his father's mansion. ⁴⁷³There was the explanation that he was in hiding for a crime, or that he was mad and that they wished to avoid an asylum, or that he had some disease which caused his segregation. ⁴⁷⁴I could think of no other adequate solutions. ⁴⁷⁵These, then, had to be sifted and balanced against each other.

⁴⁷⁶“The criminal solution would not bear inspection. ⁴⁷⁷No unsolved crime had been reported from that district. ⁴⁷⁸I was sure of that. ⁴⁷⁹If it were some crime not yet discovered, then clearly it would be to the interest of the family to get rid of the delinquent and send him abroad rather than keep him concealed at home. ⁴⁸⁰I could see no explanation for such a line of conduct.

⁴⁸¹“Insanity was more plausible. ⁴⁸²The presence of the second person in the outhouse suggested a keeper. ⁴⁸³The fact that he locked the door when he came out strengthened the supposition and gave the idea of constraint. ⁴⁸⁴On the other hand, this constraint could not be severe or the young man could not have got loose and come down to have a look at his friend. ⁴⁸⁵You will remember, Mr. Dodd, that I felt round for points, asking you, for example, about the paper which Mr. Kent was reading. ⁴⁸⁶Had it been the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal* it would have helped me. ⁴⁸⁷It is not illegal, however, to keep a lunatic upon private premises so long as there is a qualified person in attendance and that the authorities have been duly notified. ⁴⁸⁸Why, then, all this desperate desire for secrecy? ⁴⁸⁹Once again I could not get the theory to fit the facts.

⁴⁹⁰“There remained the third possibility, into which, rare and unlikely as it was, everything seemed to fit. ⁴⁹¹Leprosy is not uncommon in South Africa. ⁴⁹²By some extraordinary chance this youth might have contracted it. ⁴⁹³His people would be placed in a very dreadful position, since they would desire to save him from segregation. ⁴⁹⁴Great secrecy would be needed to prevent rumours from getting about and subsequent interference by the authorities. ⁴⁹⁵A devoted medical man, if sufficiently paid, would easily be found to take charge of the sufferer. ⁴⁹⁶There would be no reason why the latter should not be allowed freedom after dark. ⁴⁹⁷Bleaching of the skin is a common result of the disease. ⁴⁹⁸The case was a strong one—so strong that I determined to act as if it were actually proved. ⁴⁹⁹When on arriving here I noticed that Ralph, who carries out the meals, had gloves which are impregnated with disinfectants, my last doubts were removed. ⁵⁰⁰A single word showed you, sir, that your secret was discovered, and if I wrote rather than said it, it was to prove to you that my discretion was to be trusted.”

⁵⁰¹I was finishing this little analysis of the case when the door was opened and the austere figure of the great dermatologist was ushered in. ⁵⁰²But for once his sphinx-like features had relaxed and there was a warm humanity in his eyes. ⁵⁰³He strode up to Colonel Emsworth and shook him by the hand.

⁵⁰⁴“It is often my lot to bring ill-tidings and seldom good,” said he. ⁵⁰⁵“This occasion is the more welcome. ⁵⁰⁶It is not leprosy.”

⁵⁰⁷“What?”

⁵⁰⁸“A well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scale-like affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly noninfective. ⁵⁰⁹Yes, Mr. Holmes, the coincidence is a remarkable one. ⁵¹⁰But is it coincidence? ⁵¹¹Are there not subtle forces at work of which we know little? ⁵¹²Are we assured that the apprehension from which this young man has no doubt suffered terribly since his exposure to its contagion may not produce a physical effect which simulates that which it fears? ⁵¹³At any rate, I pledge my professional reputation—⁵¹⁴But the lady has fainted! ⁵¹⁵I think that Mr. Kent had better be with her until she recovers from this joyous shock.”

The Adventure Of The Mazarin Stone

¹It was pleasant to Dr. Watson to find himself once more in the untidy room of the first floor in Baker Street which had been the starting-point of so many remarkable adventures. ²He looked round him at the scientific charts upon the wall, the acid-charred bench of chemicals, the violin-case leaning in the corner, the coal-scuttle, which contained of old the pipes and tobacco. ³Finally, his eyes came round to the fresh and smiling face of Billy, the young but very wise and tactful page, who had helped a little to fill up the gap of loneliness and isolation which surrounded the saturnine figure of the great detective.

⁴“It all seems very unchanged, Billy. ⁵You don't change, either. ⁶I hope the same can be said of him?”

⁷Billy glanced with some solicitude at the closed door of the bedroom.

⁸“I think he's in bed and asleep,” he said.

⁹It was seven in the evening of a lovely summer's day, but Dr. Watson was sufficiently familiar with the irregularity of his old friend's hours to feel no surprise at the idea.

¹⁰“That means a case, I suppose?”

¹¹“Yes, sir, he is very hard at it just now. ¹²I'm frightened for his health. ¹³He gets paler and thinner, and he eats nothing. ¹⁴“When will you be pleased to dine, Mr. Holmes?” Mrs. Hudson asked. ¹⁵“Seven-thirty, the day after to-morrow,” said he. ¹⁶You know his way when he is keen on a case.”

¹⁷“Yes, Billy, I know.”

¹⁸“He's following someone. ¹⁹Yesterday he was out as a workman looking for a job. ²⁰To-day he was an old woman. ²¹Fairly took me in, he did, and I ought to know his ways by now.” ²²Billy pointed with a grin to a very baggy parasol which leaned against the sofa. ²³“That's part of the old woman's outfit,” he said.

²⁴“But what is it all about, Billy?”

²⁵Billy sank his voice, as one who discusses great secrets of State. ²⁶“I don't mind telling you, sir, but it should go no farther. ²⁷It's this case of the Crown diamond.”

²⁸“What—the hundred-thousand-pound burglary?”

²⁹“Yes, sir. ³⁰They must get it back, sir. ³¹Why, we had the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary both sitting on that very sofa. ³²Mr. Holmes was very nice to them. ³³He soon put them at their ease and promised he would do all he could. ³⁴Then there is Lord Cantlemere—”

³⁵“Ah!”

³⁶“Yes, sir, you know what that means. ³⁷He's a stiff 'un, sir, if I may say so. ³⁸I can get along with the Prime Minister, and I've nothing against the Home Secretary, who seemed a civil, obliging sort of man, but I can't stand his Lordship. ³⁹Neither can Mr. Holmes, sir. ⁴⁰You see, he don't believe in Mr. Holmes and he was against employing him. ⁴¹He'd rather he failed.”

⁴²“And Mr. Holmes knows it?”

⁴³“Mr. Holmes always knows whatever there is to know.”

⁴⁴“Well, we'll hope he won't fail and that Lord Cantlemere will be confounded. ⁴⁵But I say, Billy, what is that curtain for across the window?”

⁴⁶“Mr. Holmes had it put up there three days ago. ⁴⁷We've got something funny behind it.”

⁴⁸Billy advanced and drew away the drapery which screened the alcove of the bow window.

⁴⁹Dr. Watson could not restrain a cry of amazement. ⁵⁰There was a facsimile of his old friend, dressing-gown and all, the face turned three-quarters towards the window and downward, as though reading an invisible book, while the body was sunk deep in an armchair. ⁵¹Billy detached the head and held it in the air.

⁵²“We put it at different angles, so that it may seem more lifelike. ⁵³I wouldn't dare touch it if the blind were not down. ⁵⁴But when it's up you can see this from across the way.”

⁵⁵“We used something of the sort once before.”

⁵⁶“Before my time,” said Billy. ⁵⁷He drew the window curtains apart and looked out into the street. ⁵⁸“There are folk who watch us from over yonder. ⁵⁹I can see a fellow now at the window. ⁶⁰Have a look for yourself.”

⁶¹Watson had taken a step forward when the bedroom door opened, and the long, thin form of Holmes emerged, his face pale and drawn, but his step and bearing as active as ever. ⁶²With a single spring he was at the window, and had drawn the blind once more.

⁶³“That will do, Billy,” said he. ⁶⁴“You were in danger of your life then, my boy, and I can't do without you just yet. ⁶⁵Well, Watson, it is good to see you in your old quarters once again. ⁶⁶You come at a critical moment.”

⁶⁷“So I gather.”

⁶⁸“You can go, Billy. ⁶⁹That boy is a problem, Watson. ⁷⁰How far am I justified in allowing him to be in danger?”

⁷¹“Danger of what, Holmes?”

⁷²“Of sudden death. ⁷³I'm expecting something this evening.”

⁷⁴“Expecting what?”

⁷⁵“To be murdered, Watson.”

⁷⁶“No, no, you are joking, Holmes!”

⁷⁷“Even my limited sense of humour could evolve a better joke than that. ⁷⁸But we may be comfortable in the meantime, may we not? ⁷⁹Is alcohol permitted? ⁸⁰The gasogene and cigars are in the old place. ⁸¹Let me see you once more in the customary armchair. ⁸²You have not, I hope, learned to despise my pipe and my lamentable tobacco? ⁸³It has to take the place of food these days.”

⁸⁴“But why not eat?”

⁸⁵“Because the faculties become refined when you starve them. ⁸⁶Why, surely, as a doctor, my dear Watson, you must admit that what your digestion gains in the way of blood supply is so much lost to the brain. ⁸⁷I am a brain, Watson. ⁸⁸The rest of me is a mere appendix. ⁸⁹Therefore, it is the brain I must consider.”

⁹⁰“But this danger, Holmes?”

⁹¹“Ah, yes, in case it should come off, it would perhaps be as well that you should burden your memory with the name and address of the murderer. ⁹²You can give it to Scotland Yard, with my love and a parting blessing. ⁹³Sylvius is the name—Count Negretto Sylvius. ⁹⁴Write it down, man, write it down! ⁹⁵136 Moorside Gardens, N. W. ⁹⁶Got it?”

⁹⁷Watson's honest face was twitching with anxiety. ⁹⁸He knew only too well the immense risks taken by Holmes and was well aware that what he said was more likely to be under-statement than exaggeration. ⁹⁹Watson was always the man of action, and he rose to the occasion.

¹⁰⁰"Count me in, Holmes. ¹⁰¹I have nothing to do for a day or two."

¹⁰²"Your morals don't improve, Watson. ¹⁰³You have added fibbing to your other vices. ¹⁰⁴You bear every sign of the busy medical man, with calls on him every hour."

¹⁰⁵"Not such important ones. ¹⁰⁶But can't you have this fellow arrested?"

¹⁰⁷"Yes, Watson, I could. ¹⁰⁸That's what worries him so."

¹⁰⁹"But why don't you?"

¹¹⁰"Because I don't know where the diamond is."

¹¹¹"Ah! Billy told me—the missing Crown jewel!"

¹¹²"Yes, the great yellow Mazarin stone. ¹¹³I've cast my net and I have my fish. ¹¹⁴But I have not got the stone. ¹¹⁵What is the use of taking them? ¹¹⁶We can make the world a better place by laying them by the heels. ¹¹⁷But that is not what I am out for. ¹¹⁸It's the stone I want."

¹¹⁹"And is this Count Sylvius one of your fish?"

¹²⁰"Yes, and he's a shark. ¹²¹He bites. ¹²²The other is Sam Merton, the boxer. ¹²³Not a bad fellow, Sam, but the Count has used him. ¹²⁴Sam's not a shark. ¹²⁵He is a great big silly bull-headed gudgeon. ¹²⁶But he is flopping about in my net all the same."

¹²⁷"Where is this Count Sylvius?"

¹²⁸"I've been at his very elbow all the morning. ¹²⁹You've seen me as an old lady, Watson. ¹³⁰I was never more convincing. ¹³¹He actually picked up my parasol for me once. ¹³²'By your leave, madame,' said he—half-Italian, you know, and with the Southern graces of manner when in the mood, but a devil incarnate in the other mood. ¹³³Life is full of whimsical happenings, Watson."

¹³⁴"It might have been tragedy."

¹³⁵"Well, perhaps it might. ¹³⁶I followed him to old Straubenzee's workshop in the Minories. ¹³⁷Straubenzee made the air-gun—a very pretty bit of work, as I understand, and I rather fancy it is in the opposite window at the present moment. ¹³⁸Have you seen the dummy? ¹³⁹Of course, Billy showed it to you. ¹⁴⁰Well, it may get a bullet through its beautiful head at any moment. ¹⁴¹Ah, Billy, what is it?"

¹⁴²The boy had reappeared in the room with a card upon a tray. ¹⁴³Holmes glanced at it with raised eyebrows and an amused smile.

¹⁴⁴"The man himself. ¹⁴⁵I had hardly expected this. ¹⁴⁶Grasp the nettle, Watson! ¹⁴⁷A man of nerve. ¹⁴⁸Possibly you have heard of his reputation as a shooter of big game. ¹⁴⁹It would indeed be a triumphant ending to his excellent sporting record if he added me to his bag. ¹⁵⁰This is a proof that he feels my toe very close behind his heel."

¹⁵¹"Send for the police."

¹⁵²"I probably shall. ¹⁵³But not just yet. ¹⁵⁴Would you glance carefully out of the window, Watson, and see if anyone is hanging about in the street?"

¹⁵⁵Watson looked warily round the edge of the curtain.

¹⁵⁶"Yes, there is one rough fellow near the door."

¹⁵⁷“That will be Sam Merton—the faithful but rather fatuous Sam. ¹⁵⁸Where is this gentleman, Billy?”

¹⁵⁹“In the waiting-room, sir.”

¹⁶⁰“Show him up when I ring.”

¹⁶¹“Yes, sir.”

¹⁶²“If I am not in the room, show him in all the same.”

¹⁶³“Yes, sir.”

¹⁶⁴Watson waited until the door was closed, and then he turned earnestly to his companion.

¹⁶⁵“Look here, Holmes, this is simply impossible. ¹⁶⁶This is a desperate man, who sticks at nothing.

¹⁶⁷He may have come to murder you.”

¹⁶⁸“I should not be surprised.”

¹⁶⁹“I insist upon staying with you.”

¹⁷⁰“You would be horribly in the way.”

¹⁷¹“In his way?”

¹⁷²“No, my dear fellow—in my way.”

¹⁷³“Well, I can't possibly leave you.”

¹⁷⁴“Yes, you can, Watson. ¹⁷⁵And you will, for you have never failed to play the game. ¹⁷⁶I am sure you will play it to the end. ¹⁷⁷This man has come for his own purpose, but he may stay for mine.” ¹⁷⁸Holmes took out his notebook and scribbled a few lines. ¹⁷⁹“Take a cab to Scotland Yard and give this to Youghal of the C. I. D. ¹⁸⁰Come back with the police. ¹⁸¹The fellow's arrest will follow.”

¹⁸²“I'll do that with joy.”

¹⁸³“Before you return I may have just time enough to find out where the stone is.” ¹⁸⁴He touched the bell. ¹⁸⁵“I think we will go out through the bedroom. ¹⁸⁶This second exit is exceedingly useful. ¹⁸⁷I rather want to see my shark without his seeing me, and I have, as you will remember, my own way of doing it.”

¹⁸⁸It was, therefore, an empty room into which Billy, a minute later, ushered Count Sylvius. ¹⁸⁹The famous game-shot, sportsman, and man-about-town was a big, swarthy fellow, with a formidable dark moustache shading a cruel, thin-lipped mouth, and surmounted by a long, curved nose like the beak of an eagle. ¹⁹⁰He was well dressed, but his brilliant necktie, shining pin, and glittering rings were flamboyant in their effect. ¹⁹¹As the door closed behind him he looked round him with fierce, startled eyes, like one who suspects a trap at every turn. ¹⁹²Then he gave a violent start as he saw the impassive head and the collar of the dressing-gown which projected above the armchair in the window. ¹⁹³At first his expression was one of pure amazement. ¹⁹⁴Then the light of a horrible hope gleamed in his dark, murderous eyes. ¹⁹⁵He took one more glance round to see that there were no witnesses, and then, on tiptoe, his thick stick half raised, he approached the silent figure. ¹⁹⁶He was crouching for his final spring and blow when a cool, sardonic voice greeted him from the open bedroom door:

¹⁹⁷“Don't break it, Count! ¹⁹⁸Don't break it!”

¹⁹⁹The assassin staggered back, amazement in his convulsed face. ²⁰⁰For an instant he half raised his loaded cane once more, as if he would turn his violence from the effigy to the original; but there was something in that steady gray eye and mocking smile which caused his hand to sink to his side.

²⁰¹“It's a pretty little thing,” said Holmes, advancing towards the image. ²⁰²“Tavernier, the French modeller, made it. ²⁰³He is as good at waxworks as your friend Straubenzee is at air-guns.”

²⁰⁴“Air-guns, sir! ²⁰⁵What do you mean?”

²⁰⁶“Put your hat and stick on the side-table. ²⁰⁷Thank you! ²⁰⁸Pray take a seat. ²⁰⁹Would you care to put your revolver out also? ²¹⁰Oh, very good, if you prefer to sit upon it. ²¹¹Your visit is really most opportune, for I wanted badly to have a few minutes' chat with you.”

²¹²The Count scowled, with heavy, threatening eyebrows.

²¹³“I, too, wished to have some words with you, Holmes. ²¹⁴That is why I am here. ²¹⁵I won't deny that I intended to assault you just now.”

²¹⁶Holmes swung his leg on the edge of the table.

²¹⁷“I rather gathered that you had some idea of the sort in your head,” said he. ²¹⁸“But why these personal attentions?”

²¹⁹“Because you have gone out of your way to annoy me. ²²⁰Because you have put your creatures upon my track.”

²²¹“My creatures! ²²²I assure you no!”

²²³“Nonsense! ²²⁴I have had them followed. ²²⁵Two can play at that game, Holmes.”

²²⁶“It is a small point, Count Sylvius, but perhaps you would kindly give me my prefix when you address me. ²²⁷You can understand that, with my routine of work, I should find myself on familiar terms with half the rogues' gallery, and you will agree that exceptions are invidious.”

²²⁸“Well, Mr. Holmes, then.”

²²⁹“Excellent! ²³⁰But I assure you you are mistaken about my alleged agents.”

²³¹Count Sylvius laughed contemptuously.

²³²“Other people can observe as well as you. ²³³Yesterday there was an old sporting man. ²³⁴To-day it was an elderly woman. ²³⁵They held me in view all day.”

²³⁶“Really, sir, you compliment me. ²³⁷Old Baron Dowson said the night before he was hanged that in my case what the law had gained the stage had lost. ²³⁸And now you give my little impersonations your kindly praise?”

²³⁹“It was you—you yourself?”

²⁴⁰Holmes shrugged his shoulders. ²⁴¹“You can see in the corner the parasol which you so politely handed to me in the Minories before you began to suspect.”

²⁴²“If I had known, you might never—”

²⁴³“Have seen this humble home again. ²⁴⁴I was well aware of it. ²⁴⁵We all have neglected opportunities to deplore. ²⁴⁶As it happens, you did not know, so here we are!”

²⁴⁷The Count's knotted brows gathered more heavily over his menacing eyes. ²⁴⁸“What you say only makes the matter worse. ²⁴⁹It was not your agents but your play-acting, busybody self! ²⁵⁰You admit that you have dogged me. ²⁵¹Why?”

²⁵²“Come now, Count. ²⁵³You used to shoot lions in Algeria.”

²⁵⁴“Well?”

²⁵⁵“But why?”

²⁵⁶“Why? ²⁵⁷The sport—the excitement—the danger!”

²⁵⁸“And, no doubt, to free the country from a pest?”

²⁵⁹“Exactly!”

²⁶⁰“My reasons in a nutshell!”

²⁶¹The Count sprang to his feet, and his hand involuntarily moved back to his hip-pocket.

²⁶²“Sit down, sir, sit down! ²⁶³There was another, more practical, reason. ²⁶⁴I want that yellow diamond!”

²⁶⁵Count Sylvius lay back in his chair with an evil smile.

²⁶⁶“Upon my word!” said he.

²⁶⁷“You knew that I was after you for that. ²⁶⁸The real reason why you are here to-night is to find out how much I know about the matter and how far my removal is absolutely essential. ²⁶⁹Well, I should say that, from your point of view, it is absolutely essential, for I know all about it, save only one thing, which you are about to tell me.”

²⁷⁰“Oh, indeed! ²⁷¹And pray, what is this missing fact?”

²⁷²“Where the Crown diamond now is.”

²⁷³The Count looked sharply at his companion. ²⁷⁴“Oh, you want to know that, do you? ²⁷⁵How the devil should I be able to tell you where it is?”

²⁷⁶“You can, and you will.”

²⁷⁷“Indeed!”

²⁷⁸“You can't bluff me, Count Sylvius.” ²⁷⁹Holmes's eyes, as he gazed at him, contracted and lightened until they were like two menacing points of steel. ²⁸⁰“You are absolute plate-glass. ²⁸¹I see to the very back of your mind.”

²⁸²“Then, of course, you see where the diamond is!”

²⁸³Holmes clapped his hands with amusement, and then pointed a derisive finger. ²⁸⁴“Then you do know.

²⁸⁵You have admitted it!”

²⁸⁶“I admit nothing.”

²⁸⁷“Now, Count, if you will be reasonable we can do business. ²⁸⁸If not, you will get hurt.”

²⁸⁹Count Sylvius threw up his eyes to the ceiling. ²⁹⁰“And you talk about bluff!” said he.

²⁹¹Holmes looked at him thoughtfully like a master chess-player who meditates his crowning move.

²⁹²Then he threw open the table drawer and drew out a squat notebook.

²⁹³“Do you know what I keep in this book?”

²⁹⁴“No, sir, I do not!”

²⁹⁵“You!”

²⁹⁶“Me!”

²⁹⁷“Yes, sir, you! ²⁹⁸You are all here—every action of your vile and dangerous life.”

²⁹⁹“Damn you, Holmes!” cried the Count with blazing eyes. ³⁰⁰“There are limits to my patience!”

³⁰¹“It's all here, Count. ³⁰²The real facts as to the death of old Mrs. Harold, who left you the Blymer estate, which you so rapidly gambled away.”

³⁰³“You are dreaming!”

³⁰⁴“And the complete life history of Miss Minnie Warrender.”

³⁰⁵“Tut! ³⁰⁶You will make nothing of that!”

³⁰⁷“Plenty more here, Count. ³⁰⁸Here is the robbery in the train de-luxe to the Riviera on February 13, 1892. ³⁰⁹Here is the forged check in the same year on the Credit Lyonnais.”

³¹⁰“No; you're wrong there.”

³¹¹“Then I am right on the others! ³¹²Now, Count, you are a card-player. ³¹³When the other fellow has all the trumps, it saves time to throw down your hand.”

³¹⁴“What has all this talk to do with the jewel of which you spoke?”

³¹⁵“Gently, Count. ³¹⁶Restrain that eager mind! ³¹⁷Let me get to the points in my own humdrum fashion. ³¹⁸I have all this against you; but, above all, I have a clear case against both you and your fighting bully in the case of the Crown diamond.”

³¹⁹“Indeed!”

³²⁰“I have the cabman who took you to Whitehall and the cabman who brought you away. ³²¹I have the commissionaire who saw you near the case. ³²²I have Ikey Sanders, who refused to cut it up for you. ³²³Ikey has peached, and the game is up.”

³²⁴The veins stood out on the Count's forehead. ³²⁵His dark, hairy hands were clenched in a convulsion of restrained emotion. ³²⁶He tried to speak, but the words would not shape themselves.

³²⁷“That's the hand I play from,” said Holmes. ³²⁸“I put it all upon the table. ³²⁹But one card is missing. ³³⁰It's the king of diamonds. ³³¹I don't know where the stone is.”

³³²“You never shall know.”

³³³“No? ³³⁴Now, be reasonable, Count. ³³⁵Consider the situation. ³³⁶You are going to be locked up for twenty years. ³³⁷So is Sam Merton. ³³⁸What good are you going to get out of your diamond? ³³⁹None in the world. ³⁴⁰But if you hand it over—well, I'll compound a felony. ³⁴¹We don't want you or Sam. ³⁴²We want the stone. ³⁴³Give that up, and so far as I am concerned you can go free so long as you behave yourself in the future. ³⁴⁴If you make another slip—well, it will be the last. ³⁴⁵But this time my commission is to get the stone, not you.”

³⁴⁶“But if I refuse?”

³⁴⁷“Why, then—alas!—it must be you and not the stone.”

³⁴⁸Billy had appeared in answer to a ring.

³⁴⁹“I think, Count, that it would be as well to have your friend Sam at this conference. ³⁵⁰After all, his interests should be represented. ³⁵¹Billy, you will see a large and ugly gentleman outside the front door. ³⁵²Ask him to come up.”

³⁵³“If he won't come, sir?”

³⁵⁴“No violence, Billy. ³⁵⁵Don't be rough with him. ³⁵⁶If you tell him that Count Sylvius wants him he will certainly come.”

³⁵⁷“What are you going to do now?” asked the Count as Billy disappeared.

³⁵⁸“My friend Watson was with me just now. ³⁵⁹I told him that I had a shark and a gudgeon in my net; now I am drawing the net and up they come together.”

³⁶⁰The Count had risen from his chair, and his hand was behind his back. ³⁶¹Holmes held something half protruding from the pocket of his dressing-gown.

³⁶²“You won't die in your bed, Holmes.”

³⁶³“I have often had the same idea. ³⁶⁴Does it matter very much? ³⁶⁵After all, Count, your own exit is more likely to be perpendicular than horizontal. ³⁶⁶But these anticipations of the future are morbid. ³⁶⁷Why not give ourselves up to the unrestrained enjoyment of the present?”

³⁶⁸A sudden wild-beast light sprang up in the dark, menacing eyes of the master criminal. ³⁶⁹Holmes's figure seemed to grow taller as he grew tense and ready.

³⁷⁰“It is no use your fingering your revolver, my friend,” he said in a quiet voice. ³⁷¹“You know perfectly well that you dare not use it, even if I gave you time to draw it. ³⁷²Nasty, noisy things, revolvers, Count. ³⁷³Better stick to air-guns. ³⁷⁴Ah! ³⁷⁵I think I hear the fairy footstep of your estimable partner. ³⁷⁶Good day, Mr. Merton. ³⁷⁷Rather dull in the street, is it not?”

³⁷⁸The prize-fighter, a heavily built young man with a stupid, obstinate, slab-sided face, stood awkwardly at the door, looking about him with a puzzled expression. ³⁷⁹Holmes's debonair manner was a new experience, and though he vaguely felt that it was hostile, he did not know how to counter it. ³⁸⁰He turned to his more astute comrade for help.

³⁸¹“What's the game now, Count? ³⁸²What's this fellow want? ³⁸³What's up?” ³⁸⁴His voice was deep and raucous.

³⁸⁵The Count shrugged his shoulders, and it was Holmes who answered.

³⁸⁶“If I may put it in a nutshell, Mr. Merton, I should say it was all up.”

³⁸⁷The boxer still addressed his remarks to his associate.

³⁸⁸“Is this cove trying to be funny, or what? ³⁸⁹I'm not in the funny mood myself.”

³⁹⁰“No, I expect not,” said Holmes. ³⁹¹“I think I can promise you that you will feel even less humorous as the evening advances. ³⁹²Now, look here, Count Sylvius. ³⁹³I'm a busy man and I can't waste time. ³⁹⁴I'm going into that bedroom. ³⁹⁵Pray make yourselves quite at home in my absence. ³⁹⁶You can explain to your friend how the matter lies without the restraint of my presence. ³⁹⁷I shall try over the Hoffman ‘Barcarole’ upon my violin. ³⁹⁸In five minutes I shall return for your final answer. ³⁹⁹You quite grasp the alternative, do you not? ⁴⁰⁰Shall we take you, or shall we have the stone?”

⁴⁰¹Holmes withdrew, picking up his violin from the corner as he passed. ⁴⁰²A few moments later the long-drawn, wailing notes of that most haunting of tunes came faintly through the closed door of the bedroom.

⁴⁰³“What is it, then?” asked Merton anxiously as his companion turned to him. ⁴⁰⁴“Does he know about the stone?”

⁴⁰⁵“He knows a damned sight too much about it. ⁴⁰⁶I'm not sure that he doesn't know all about it.”

⁴⁰⁷“Good Lord!” ⁴⁰⁸The boxer's sallow face turned a shade whiter.

⁴⁰⁹“Ikey Sanders has split on us.”

⁴¹⁰“He has, has he? ⁴¹¹I'll do him down a thick 'un for that if I swing for it.”

⁴¹²“That won't help us much. ⁴¹³We've got to make up our minds what to do.”

⁴¹⁴“Half a mo',” said the boxer, looking suspiciously at the bedroom door. ⁴¹⁵“He's a leary cove that wants watching. ⁴¹⁶I suppose he's not listening?”

⁴¹⁷“How can he be listening with that music going?”

⁴¹⁸“That's right. ⁴¹⁹Maybe somebody's behind a curtain. ⁴²⁰Too many curtains in this room.” ⁴²¹As he looked round he suddenly saw for the first time the effigy in the window, and stood staring and pointing, too amazed for words.

⁴²²“Tut! it's only a dummy,” said the Count.

⁴²³“A fake, is it? ⁴²⁴Well, strike me! ⁴²⁵Madame Tussaud ain't in it. ⁴²⁶It's the living spit of him, gown and all. ⁴²⁷But them curtains, Count!”

⁴²⁸“Oh, confound the curtains! ⁴²⁹We are wasting our time, and there is none too much. ⁴³⁰He can lag us over this stone.”

⁴³¹“The deuce he can!”

⁴³²“But he'll let us slip if we only tell him where the swag is.”

⁴³³“What! ⁴³⁴Give it up? ⁴³⁵Give up a hundred thousand quid?”

⁴³⁶“It's one or the other.”

⁴³⁷Merton scratched his short-cropped pate.

⁴³⁸“He's alone in there. ⁴³⁹Let's do him in. ⁴⁴⁰If his light were out we should have nothing to fear.”

⁴⁴¹The Count shook his head.

⁴⁴²“He is armed and ready. ⁴⁴³If we shot him we could hardly get away in a place like this. ⁴⁴⁴Besides, it's likely enough that the police know whatever evidence he has got. ⁴⁴⁵Hallo! ⁴⁴⁶What was that?”

⁴⁴⁷There was a vague sound which seemed to come from the window. ⁴⁴⁸Both men sprang round, but all was quiet. ⁴⁴⁹Save for the one strange figure seated in the chair, the room was certainly empty.

⁴⁵⁰“Something in the street,” said Merton. ⁴⁵¹“Now look here, guv'nor, you've got the brains. ⁴⁵²Surely you can think a way out of it. ⁴⁵³If slugging is no use then it's up to you.”

⁴⁵⁴“I've fooled better men than he,” the Count answered. ⁴⁵⁵“The stone is here in my secret pocket. ⁴⁵⁶I take no chances leaving it about. ⁴⁵⁷It can be out of England to-night and cut into four pieces in Amsterdam before Sunday. ⁴⁵⁸He knows nothing of Van Seddar.”

⁴⁵⁹“I thought Van Seddar was going next week.”

⁴⁶⁰“He was. ⁴⁶¹But now he must get off by the next boat. ⁴⁶²One or other of us must slip round with the stone to Lime Street and tell him.”

⁴⁶³“But the false bottom ain't ready.”

⁴⁶⁴“Well, he must take it as it is and chance it. ⁴⁶⁵There's not a moment to lose.” ⁴⁶⁶Again, with the sense of danger which becomes an instinct with the sportsman, he paused and looked hard at the window.

⁴⁶⁷Yes, it was surely from the street that the faint sound had come.

⁴⁶⁸“As to Holmes,” he continued, “we can fool him easily enough. ⁴⁶⁹You see, the damned fool won't arrest us if he can get the stone. ⁴⁷⁰Well, we'll promise him the stone. ⁴⁷¹We'll put him on the wrong track about it, and before he finds that it is the wrong track it will be in Holland and we out of the country.”

⁴⁷²“That sounds good to me!” cried Sam Merton with a grin.

⁴⁷³“You go on and tell the Dutchman to get a move on him. ⁴⁷⁴I'll see this sucker and fill him up with a bogus confession. ⁴⁷⁵I'll tell him that the stone is in Liverpool. ⁴⁷⁶Confound that whining music; it gets on my nerves! ⁴⁷⁷By the time he finds it isn't in Liverpool it will be in quarters and we on the blue water. ⁴⁷⁸Come back here, out of a line with that keyhole. ⁴⁷⁹Here is the stone.”

⁴⁸⁰“I wonder you dare carry it.”

⁴⁸¹“Where could I have it safer? ⁴⁸²If we could take it out of Whitehall someone else could surely take it out of my lodgings.”

⁴⁸³“Let's have a look at it.”

⁴⁸⁴Count Sylvius cast a somewhat unflattering glance at his associate and disregarded the unwashed hand which was extended towards him.

⁴⁸⁵“What—d'ye think I'm going to snatch it off you? ⁴⁸⁶See here, mister, I'm getting a bit tired of your ways.”

⁴⁸⁷“Well, well, no offence, Sam. ⁴⁸⁸We can't afford to quarrel. ⁴⁸⁹Come over to the window if you want to see the beauty properly. ⁴⁹⁰Now hold it to the light! ⁴⁹¹Here!”

⁴⁹²“Thank you!”

⁴⁹³With a single spring Holmes had leaped from the dummy's chair and had grasped the precious jewel. ⁴⁹⁴He held it now in one hand, while his other pointed a revolver at the Count's head. ⁴⁹⁵The two villains staggered back in utter amazement. ⁴⁹⁶Before they had recovered Holmes had pressed the electric bell.

⁴⁹⁷“No violence, gentlemen—no violence, I beg of you! ⁴⁹⁸Consider the furniture! ⁴⁹⁹It must be very clear to you that your position is an impossible one. ⁵⁰⁰The police are waiting below.”

⁵⁰¹The Count's bewilderment overmastered his rage and fear.

⁵⁰²“But how the deuce—?” he gasped.

⁵⁰³“Your surprise is very natural. ⁵⁰⁴You are not aware that a second door from my bedroom leads behind that curtain. ⁵⁰⁵I fancied that you must have heard me when I displaced the figure, but luck was on my side. ⁵⁰⁶It gave me a chance of listening to your racy conversation which would have been painfully constrained had you been aware of my presence.”

⁵⁰⁷The Count gave a gesture of resignation.

⁵⁰⁸“We give you best, Holmes. ⁵⁰⁹I believe you are the devil himself.”

⁵¹⁰“Not far from him, at any rate,” Holmes answered with a polite smile.

⁵¹¹Sam Merton's slow intellect had only gradually appreciated the situation. ⁵¹²Now, as the sound of heavy steps came from the stairs outside, he broke silence at last.

⁵¹³“A fair cop!” said he. ⁵¹⁴“But, I say, what about that bloomin' fiddle! ⁵¹⁵I hear it yet.”

⁵¹⁶“Tut, tut!” Holmes answered. ⁵¹⁷“You are perfectly right. ⁵¹⁸Let it play! ⁵¹⁹These modern gramophones are a remarkable invention.”

⁵²⁰There was an inrush of police, the handcuffs clicked and the criminals were led to the waiting cab. ⁵²¹Watson lingered with Holmes, congratulating him upon this fresh leaf added to his laurels. ⁵²²Once more their conversation was interrupted by the imperturbable Billy with his card-tray.

⁵²³“Lord Cantlemere, sir.”

⁵²⁴“Show him up, Billy. ⁵²⁵This is the eminent peer who represents the very highest interests,” said Holmes. ⁵²⁶“He is an excellent and loyal person, but rather of the old regime. ⁵²⁷Shall we make him unbend? ⁵²⁸Dare we venture upon a slight liberty? ⁵²⁹He knows, we may conjecture, nothing of what has occurred.”

⁵³⁰The door opened to admit a thin, austere figure with a hatchet face and drooping mid-Victorian whiskers of a glossy blackness which hardly corresponded with the rounded shoulders and feeble gait.

⁵³¹Holmes advanced affably, and shook an unresponsive hand.

⁵³²“How do you do, Lord Cantlemere? ⁵³³It is chilly for the time of year, but rather warm indoors. ⁵³⁴May I take your overcoat?”

⁵³⁵“No, I thank you; I will not take it off.”

⁵³⁶Holmes laid his hand insistently upon the sleeve.

⁵³⁷“Pray allow me! ⁵³⁸My friend Dr. Watson would assure you that these changes of temperature are most insidious.”

⁵³⁹His Lordship shook himself free with some impatience.

⁵⁴⁰“I am quite comfortable, sir. I have no need to stay. ⁵⁴¹I have simply looked in to know how your self-appointed task was progressing.”

⁵⁴²“It is difficult—very difficult.”

⁵⁴³“I feared that you would find it so.”

⁵⁴⁴There was a distinct sneer in the old courtier's words and manner.

⁵⁴⁵“Every man finds his limitations, Mr. Holmes, but at least it cures us of the weakness of self-satisfaction.”

⁵⁴⁶“Yes, sir, I have been much perplexed.”

⁵⁴⁷“No doubt.”

⁵⁴⁸“Especially upon one point. ⁵⁴⁹Possibly you could help me upon it?”

⁵⁵⁰“You apply for my advice rather late in the day. ⁵⁵¹I thought that you had your own all-sufficient methods. ⁵⁵²Still, I am ready to help you.”

⁵⁵³“You see, Lord Cantlemere, we can no doubt frame a case against the actual thieves.”

⁵⁵⁴“When you have caught them.”

⁵⁵⁵“Exactly. ⁵⁵⁶But the question is—how shall we proceed against the receiver?”

⁵⁵⁷“Is this not rather premature?”

⁵⁵⁸“It is as well to have our plans ready. ⁵⁵⁹Now, what would you regard as final evidence against the receiver?”

⁵⁶⁰“The actual possession of the stone.”

⁵⁶¹“You would arrest him upon that?”

⁵⁶²“Most undoubtedly.”

⁵⁶³Holmes seldom laughed, but he got as near it as his old friend Watson could remember.

⁵⁶⁴“In that case, my dear sir, I shall be under the painful necessity of advising your arrest.”

⁵⁶⁵Lord Cantlemere was very angry. ⁵⁶⁶Some of the ancient fires flickered up into his sallow cheeks.

⁵⁶⁷“You take a great liberty, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁶⁸In fifty years of official life I cannot recall such a case. ⁵⁶⁹I am a busy man, sir, engaged upon important affairs, and I have no time or taste for foolish jokes. ⁵⁷⁰I may tell you frankly, sir, that I have never been a believer in your powers, and that I have always been of the opinion that the matter was far safer in the hands of the regular police force. ⁵⁷¹Your conduct confirms all my conclusions. ⁵⁷²I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-evening.”

⁵⁷³Holmes had swiftly changed his position and was between the peer and the door.

⁵⁷⁴“One moment, sir,” said he. ⁵⁷⁵“To actually go off with the Mazarin stone would be a more serious offence than to be found in temporary possession of it.”

⁵⁷⁶“Sir, this is intolerable! ⁵⁷⁷Let me pass.”

⁵⁷⁸“Put your hand in the right-hand pocket of your overcoat.”

⁵⁷⁹“What do you mean, sir?”

⁵⁸⁰“Come—come, do what I ask.”

⁵⁸¹An instant later the amazed peer was standing, blinking and stammering, with the great yellow stone on his shaking palm.

⁵⁸²“What! ⁵⁸³What! ⁵⁸⁴How is this, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵⁸⁵“Too bad, Lord Cantlemere, too bad!” cried Holmes. ⁵⁸⁶“My old friend here will tell you that I have an impish habit of practical joking. ⁵⁸⁷Also that I can never resist a dramatic situation. ⁵⁸⁸I took the liberty—the very great liberty, I admit—of putting the stone into your pocket at the beginning of our interview.”

⁵⁸⁹The old peer stared from the stone to the smiling face before him.

⁵⁹⁰“Sir, I am bewildered. ⁵⁹¹But—yes—it is indeed the Mazarin stone. ⁵⁹²We are greatly your debtors, Mr. Holmes. ⁵⁹³Your sense of humour may, as you admit, be somewhat perverted, and its exhibition remarkably untimely, but at least I withdraw any reflection I have made upon your amazing professional powers. ⁵⁹⁴But how—”

⁵⁹⁵“The case is but half finished; the details can wait. ⁵⁹⁶No doubt, Lord Cantlemere, your pleasure in telling of this successful result in the exalted circle to which you return will be some small atonement for my practical joke. ⁵⁹⁷Billy, you will show his Lordship out, and tell Mrs. Hudson that I should be glad if she would send up dinner for two as soon as possible.”

The Adventure of the Three Gables

¹I don't think that any of my adventures with Mr. Sherlock Holmes opened quite so abruptly, or so dramatically, as that which I associate with The Three Gables. ²I had not seen Holmes for some days and had no idea of the new channel into which his activities had been directed. ³He was in a chatty mood that morning, however, and had just settled me into the well-worn low armchair on one side of the fire, while he had curled down with his pipe in his mouth upon the opposite chair, when our visitor arrived. ⁴If I had said that a mad bull had arrived it would give a clearer impression of what occurred.

⁵The door had flown open and a huge negro had burst into the room. ⁶He would have been a comic figure if he had not been terrific, for he was dressed in a very loud gray check suit with a flowing salmon-coloured tie. ⁷His broad face and flattened nose were thrust forward, as his sullen dark eyes, with a smouldering gleam of malice in them, turned from one of us to the other.

⁸"Which of you gen'l'men is Masser Holmes?" he asked.

⁹Holmes raised his pipe with a languid smile.

¹⁰"Oh! it's you, is it?" said our visitor, coming with an unpleasant, stealthy step round the angle of the table. ¹¹"See here, Masser Holmes, you keep your hands out of other folks' business. ¹²Leave folks to manage their own affairs. ¹³Got that, Masser Holmes?"

¹⁴"Keep on talking," said Holmes. ¹⁵"It's fine."

¹⁶"Oh! it's fine, is it?" growled the savage. ¹⁷"It won't be so damn fine if I have to trim you up a bit. ¹⁸I've handled your kind before now, and they didn't look fine when I was through with them. ¹⁹Look at that, Masser Holmes!"

²⁰He swung a huge knotted lump of a fist under my friend's nose. ²¹Holmes examined it closely with an air of great interest. ²²"Were you born so?" he asked. ²³"Or did it come by degrees?"

²⁴It may have been the icy coolness of my friend, or it may have been the slight clatter which I made as I picked up the poker. ²⁵In any case, our visitor's manner became less flamboyant.

²⁶"Well, I've given you fair warnin'," said he. ²⁷"I've a friend that's interested out Harrow way—you know what I'm meaning—and he don't intend to have no buttin' in by you. ²⁸Got that? ²⁹You ain't the law, and I ain't the law either, and if you come in I'll be on hand also. ³⁰Don't you forget it."

³¹"I've wanted to meet you for some time," said Holmes. ³²"I won't ask you to sit down, for I don't like the smell of you, but aren't you Steve Dixie, the bruiser?"

³³"That's my name, Masser Holmes, and you'll get put through it for sure if you give me any lip."

³⁴"It is certainly the last thing you need," said Holmes, staring at our visitor's hideous mouth. ³⁵"But it was the killing of young Perkins outside the Holborn Bar— ³⁶What! you're not going?"

³⁷The negro had sprung back, and his face was leaden. ³⁸"I won't listen to no such talk," said he. ³⁹"What have I to do with this 'ere Perkins, Masser Holmes? ⁴⁰I was trainin' at the Bull Ring in Birmingham when this boy done gone get into trouble."

⁴¹"Yes, you'll tell the magistrate about it, Steve," said Holmes. ⁴²"I've been watching you and Barney Stockdale—"

⁴³"So help me the Lord! ⁴⁴Masser Holmes—"

⁴⁵"That's enough. ⁴⁶Get out of it. ⁴⁷I'll pick you up when I want you."

⁴⁸“Good-mornin', Masser Holmes. ⁴⁹I hope there ain't no hard feelin's about this 'ere visit?”

⁵⁰“There will be unless you tell me who sent you.”

⁵¹“Why, there ain't no secret about that, Masser Holmes. ⁵²It was that same gen'l'man that you have just done gone mention.”

⁵³“And who set him on to it?”

⁵⁴“S'elp me. ⁵⁵I don't know, Masser Holmes. ⁵⁶He just say, ‘Steve, you go see Mr. Holmes, and tell him his life ain't safe if he go down Harrow way.’ ⁵⁷That's the whole truth.” ⁵⁸Without waiting for any further questioning, our visitor bolted out of the room almost as precipitately as he had entered. ⁵⁹Holmes knocked out the ashes of his pipe with a quiet chuckle.

⁶⁰“I am glad you were not forced to break his woolly head, Watson. ⁶¹I observed your manoeuvres with the poker. ⁶²But he is really rather a harmless fellow, a great muscular, foolish, blustering baby, and easily cowed, as you have seen. ⁶³He is one of the Spencer John gang and has taken part in some dirty work of late which I may clear up when I have time. ⁶⁴His immediate principal, Barney, is a more astute person. ⁶⁵They specialize in assaults, intimidation, and the like. ⁶⁶What I want to know is, who is at the back of them on this particular occasion?”

⁶⁷“But why do they want to intimidate you?”

⁶⁸“It is this Harrow Weald case. ⁶⁹It decides me to look into the matter, for if it is worth anyone's while to take so much trouble, there must be something in it.”

⁷⁰“But what is it?”

⁷¹“I was going to tell you when we had this comic interlude. ⁷²Here is Mrs. Maberley's note. ⁷³If you care to come with me we will wire her and go out at once.”

⁷⁴Dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes [I read]:

⁷⁵I have had a succession of strange incidents occur to me in connection with this house, and I should much value your advice. ⁷⁶You would find me at home any time to-morrow. ⁷⁷The house is within a short walk of the Weald Station. ⁷⁸I believe that my late husband, Mortimer Maberley, was one of your early clients.

⁷⁹Yours faithfully,

⁸⁰Mary Maberley

⁸¹The address was “The Three Gables, Harrow Weald.”

⁸²“So that's that!” said Holmes. ⁸³“And now, if you can spare the time, Watson, we will get upon our way.”

⁸⁴A short railway journey, and a shorter drive, brought us to the house, a brick and timber villa, standing in its own acre of undeveloped grassland. ⁸⁵Three small projections above the upper windows made a feeble attempt to justify its name. ⁸⁶Behind was a grove of melancholy, half-grown pines, and the whole aspect of the place was poor and depressing. ⁸⁷None the less, we found the house to be well furnished, and the lady who received us was a most engaging elderly person, who bore every mark of refinement and culture.

⁸⁸“I remember your husband well, madam,” said Holmes, “though it is some years since he used my services in some trifling matter.”

⁸⁹“Probably you would be more familiar with the name of my son Douglas.”

⁹⁰Holmes looked at her with great interest.

⁹¹“Dear me! ⁹²Are you the mother of Douglas Maberley? ⁹³I knew him slightly. ⁹⁴But of course all London knew him. ⁹⁵What a magnificent creature he was! ⁹⁶Where is he now?”

⁹⁷“Dead, Mr. Holmes, dead! ⁹⁸He was attache at Rome, and he died there of pneumonia last month.”

⁹⁹“I am sorry. ¹⁰⁰One could not connect death with such a man. ¹⁰¹I have never known anyone so vitally alive. ¹⁰²He lived intensely—every fibre of him!”

¹⁰³“Too intensely, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁰⁴That was the ruin of him. ¹⁰⁵You remember him as he was—debonair and splendid. ¹⁰⁶You did not see the moody, morose, brooding creature into which he developed. ¹⁰⁷His heart was broken. ¹⁰⁸In a single month I seemed to see my gallant boy turn into a worn-out cynical man.”

¹⁰⁹“A love affair—a woman?”

¹¹⁰“Or a fiend. ¹¹¹Well, it was not to talk of my poor lad that I asked you to come, Mr. Holmes.”

¹¹²“Dr. Watson and I are at your service.”

¹¹³“There have been some very strange happenings. ¹¹⁴I have been in this house more than a year now, and as I wished to lead a retired life I have seen little of my neighbours. ¹¹⁵Three days ago I had a call from a man who said that he was a house agent. ¹¹⁶He said that this house would exactly suit a client of his, and that if I would part with it money would be no object. ¹¹⁷It seemed to me very strange as there are several empty houses on the market which appear to be equally eligible, but naturally I was interested in what he said. ¹¹⁸I therefore named a price which was five hundred pounds more than I gave. ¹¹⁹He at once closed with the offer, but added that his client desired to buy the furniture as well and would I put a price upon it. ¹²⁰Some of this furniture is from my old home, and it is, as you see, very good, so that I named a good round sum. ¹²¹To this also he at once agreed. ¹²²I had always wanted to travel, and the bargain was so good a one that it really seemed that I should be my own mistress for the rest of my life.

¹²³“Yesterday the man arrived with the agreement all drawn out. ¹²⁴Luckily I showed it to Mr. Sutro, my lawyer, who lives in Harrow. ¹²⁵He said to me, ‘This is a very strange document. ¹²⁶Are you aware that if you sign it you could not legally take anything out of the house—not even your own private possessions?’ ¹²⁷When the man came again in the evening I pointed this out, and I said that I meant only to sell the furniture.

¹²⁸“‘No, no, everything,’ said he.

¹²⁹“‘But my clothes? ¹³⁰My jewels?’

¹³¹“‘Well, well, some concession might be made for your personal effects. ¹³²But nothing shall go out of the house unchecked. ¹³³My client is a very liberal man, but he has his fads and his own way of doing things. ¹³⁴It is everything or nothing with him.’

¹³⁵“‘Then it must be nothing,’ said I. ¹³⁶And there the matter was left, but the whole thing seemed to me to be so unusual that I thought—”

¹³⁷Here we had a very extraordinary interruption.

¹³⁸Holmes raised his hand for silence. ¹³⁹Then he strode across the room, flung open the door, and dragged in a great gaunt woman whom he had seized by the shoulder. ¹⁴⁰She entered with ungainly struggle like some huge awkward chicken, torn, squawking, out of its coop.

¹⁴¹“Leave me alone! ¹⁴²What are you a-doin' of?” she screeched.

¹⁴³“Why, Susan, what is this?”

¹⁴⁴“Well, ma'am, I was comin' in to ask if the visitors was stayin' for lunch when this man jumped out at me.”

¹⁴⁵“I have been listening to her for the last five minutes, but did not wish to interrupt your most interesting narrative. ¹⁴⁶Just a little wheezy, Susan, are you not? ¹⁴⁷You breathe too heavily for that kind of work.”

¹⁴⁸Susan turned a sulky but amazed face upon her captor. ¹⁴⁹“Who be you, anyhow, and what right have you a-pullin' me about like this?”

¹⁵⁰“It was merely that I wished to ask a question in your presence. ¹⁵¹Did you, Mrs. Maberley, mention to anyone that you were going to write to me and consult me?”

¹⁵²“No, Mr. Holmes, I did not.”

¹⁵³“Who posted your letter?”

¹⁵⁴“Susan did.”

¹⁵⁵“Exactly. ¹⁵⁶Now, Susan, to whom was it that you wrote or sent a message to say that your mistress was asking advice from me?”

¹⁵⁷“It's a lie. ¹⁵⁸I sent no message.”

¹⁵⁹“Now, Susan, wheezy people may not live long, you know. ¹⁶⁰It's a wicked thing to tell fibs. ¹⁶¹Whom did you tell?”

¹⁶²“Susan!” cried her mistress, “I believe you are a bad, treacherous woman. ¹⁶³I remember now that I saw you speaking to someone over the hedge.”

¹⁶⁴“That was my own business,” said the woman sullenly.

¹⁶⁵“Suppose I tell you that it was Barney Stockdale to whom you spoke?” said Holmes.

¹⁶⁶“Well, if you know, what do you want to ask for?”

¹⁶⁷“I was not sure, but I know now. ¹⁶⁸Well now, Susan, it will be worth ten pounds to you if you will tell me who is at the back of Barney.”

¹⁶⁹“Someone that could lay down a thousand pounds for every ten you have in the world.”

¹⁷⁰“So, a rich man? ¹⁷¹No; you smiled—a rich woman. ¹⁷²Now we have got so far, you may as well give the name and earn the tenner.”

¹⁷³“I'll see you in hell first.”

¹⁷⁴“Oh, Susan! ¹⁷⁵Language!”

¹⁷⁶“I am clearing out of here. ¹⁷⁷I've had enough of you all. ¹⁷⁸I'll send for my box to-morrow.” ¹⁷⁹She flounced for the door.

¹⁸⁰“Good-bye, Susan. ¹⁸¹Paregoric is the stuff... ¹⁸²Now,” he continued, turning suddenly from lively to severe when the door had closed behind the flushed and angry woman, “this gang means business. ¹⁸³Look how close they play the game. ¹⁸⁴Your letter to me had the 10 P. M. postmark. ¹⁸⁵And yet Susan passes the word to Barney. ¹⁸⁶Barney has time to go to his employer and get instructions; he or she—I incline to the latter from Susan's grin when she thought I had blundered—forms a plan. ¹⁸⁷Black Steve is called in, and I am warned off by eleven o'clock next morning. ¹⁸⁸That's quick work, you know.”

¹⁸⁹“But what do they want?”

¹⁹⁰“Yes, that's the question. ¹⁹¹Who had the house before you?”

¹⁹²“A retired sea captain called Ferguson.”

¹⁹³“Anything remarkable about him?”

¹⁹⁴“Not that ever I heard of.”

¹⁹⁵“I was wondering whether he could have buried something. ¹⁹⁶Of course, when people bury treasure nowadays they do it in the Post-Office bank. ¹⁹⁷But there are always some lunatics about. ¹⁹⁸It would be a dull world without them. ¹⁹⁹At first I thought of some buried valuable. ²⁰⁰But why, in that case, should they want your furniture? ²⁰¹You don't happen to have a Raphael or a first folio Shakespeare without knowing it?”

²⁰²“No, I don't think I have anything rarer than a Crown Derby tea-set.”

²⁰³“That would hardly justify all this mystery. ²⁰⁴Besides, why should they not openly state what they want? ²⁰⁵If they covet your tea-set, they can surely offer a price for it without buying you out, lock, stock, and barrel. ²⁰⁶No, as I read it, there is something which you do not know that you have, and which you would not give up if you did know.”

²⁰⁷“That is how I read it,” said I.

²⁰⁸“Dr. Watson agrees, so that settles it.”

²⁰⁹“Well, Mr. Holmes, what can it be?”

²¹⁰“Let us see whether by this purely mental analysis we can get it to a finer point. ²¹¹You have been in this house a year.”

²¹²“Nearly two.”

²¹³“All the better. ²¹⁴During this long period no one wants anything from you. ²¹⁵Now suddenly within three or four days you have urgent demands. ²¹⁶What would you gather from that?”

²¹⁷“It can only mean,” said I, “that the object, whatever it may be, has only just come into the house.”

²¹⁸“Settled once again,” said Holmes. ²¹⁹“Now, Mrs. Maberley, has any object just arrived?”

²²⁰“No, I have bought nothing new this year.”

²²¹“Indeed! ²²²That is very remarkable. ²²³Well, I think we had best let matters develop a little further until we have clearer data. ²²⁴Is that lawyer of yours a capable man?”

²²⁵“Mr. Sutro is most capable.”

²²⁶“Have you another maid, or was the fair Susan, who has just banged your front door, alone?”

²²⁷“I have a young girl.”

²²⁸“Try and get Sutro to spend a night or two in the house. ²²⁹You might possibly want protection.”

²³⁰“Against whom?”

²³¹“Who knows? ²³²The matter is certainly obscure. ²³³If I can't find what they are after, I must approach the matter from the other end and try to get at the principal. ²³⁴Did this house-agent man give any address?”

²³⁵“Simply his card and occupation. ²³⁶Haines-Johnson, Auctioneer and Valuer.”

²³⁷“I don't think we shall find him in the directory. ²³⁸Honest business men don't conceal their place of business. ²³⁹Well, you will let me know any fresh development. ²⁴⁰I have taken up your case, and you may rely upon it that I shall see it through.”

²⁴¹As we passed through the hall Holmes's eyes, which missed nothing, lighted upon several trunks and cases which were piled in a corner. ²⁴²The labels shone out upon them.

²⁴³“‘Milano.’ ²⁴⁴‘Lucerne.’ ²⁴⁵These are from Italy.”

²⁴⁶“They are poor Douglas's things.”

²⁴⁷“You have not unpacked them? ²⁴⁸How long have you had them?”

²⁴⁹“They arrived last week.”

²⁵⁰“But you said—why, surely this might be the missing link. ²⁵¹How do we know that there is not something of value there?”

²⁵²“There could not possibly be, Mr. Holmes. ²⁵³Poor Douglas had only his pay and a small annuity. ²⁵⁴What could he have of value?”

²⁵⁵Holmes was lost in thought.

²⁵⁶“Delay no longer, Mrs. Maberley,” he said at last. ²⁵⁷“Have these things taken upstairs to your bedroom. ²⁵⁸Examine them as soon as possible and see what they contain. ²⁵⁹I will come to-morrow and hear your report.”

²⁶⁰It was quite evident that The Three Gables was under very close surveillance, for as we came round the high hedge at the end of the lane there was the negro prize-fighter standing in the shadow. ²⁶¹We came on him quite suddenly, and a grim and menacing figure he looked in that lonely place. ²⁶²Holmes clapped his hand to his pocket.

²⁶³“Lookin' for your gun, Masser Holmes?”

²⁶⁴“No, for my scent-bottle, Steve.”

²⁶⁵“You are funny, Masser Holmes, ain't you?”

²⁶⁶“It won't be funny for you, Steve, if I get after you. ²⁶⁷I gave you fair warning this morning.”

²⁶⁸“Well, Masser Holmes, I done gone think over what you said, and I don't want no more talk about that affair of Masser Perkins. ²⁶⁹S'pose I can help you, Masser Holmes, I will.”

²⁷⁰“Well, then, tell me who is behind you on this job.”

²⁷¹“So help me the Lord! ²⁷²Masser Holmes, I told you the truth before. ²⁷³I don't know. ²⁷⁴My boss Barney gives me orders and that's all.”

²⁷⁵“Well, just bear in mind, Steve, that the lady in that house, and everything under that roof, is under my protection. ²⁷⁶Don't forget it.”

²⁷⁷“All right, Masser Holmes. ²⁷⁸I'll remember.”

²⁷⁹“I've got him thoroughly frightened for his own skin, Watson,” Holmes remarked as we walked on.

²⁸⁰“I think he would double-cross his employer if he knew who he was. ²⁸¹It was lucky I had some knowledge of the Spencer John crowd, and that Steve was one of them. ²⁸²Now, Watson, this is a case for Langdale Pike, and I am going to see him now. ²⁸³When I get back I may be clearer in the matter.”

²⁸⁴I saw no more of Holmes during the day, but I could well imagine how he spent it, for Langdale Pike was his human book of reference upon all matters of social scandal. ²⁸⁵This strange, languid creature spent his waking hours in the bow window of a St. James's Street club and was the receiving-station as well as the transmitter for all the gossip of the metropolis. ²⁸⁶He made, it was said, a four-figure income by the paragraphs which he contributed every week to the garbage papers which cater to an inquisitive public. ²⁸⁷If ever, far down in the turbid depths of London life, there was some strange swirl or eddy, it was marked with automatic exactness by this human dial upon the surface. ²⁸⁸Holmes discreetly helped Langdale to knowledge, and on occasion was helped in turn.

²⁸⁹When I met my friend in his room early next morning, I was conscious from his bearing that all was well, but none the less a most unpleasant surprise was awaiting us. ²⁹⁰It took the shape of the following telegram:

²⁹¹Please come out at once. ²⁹²Client's house burgled in the night. ²⁹³Police in possession.

²⁹⁴— Sutro.

²⁹⁵Holmes whistled. ²⁹⁶"The drama has come to a crisis, and quicker than I had expected. ²⁹⁷There is a great driving-power at the back of this business, Watson, which does not surprise me after what I have heard. ²⁹⁸This Sutro, of course, is her lawyer. ²⁹⁹I made a mistake, I fear, in not asking you to spend the night on guard. ³⁰⁰This fellow has clearly proved a broken reed. ³⁰¹Well, there is nothing for it but another journey to Harrow Weald."

³⁰²We found The Three Gables a very different establishment to the orderly household of the previous day. ³⁰³A small group of idlers had assembled at the garden gate, while a couple of constables were examining the windows and the geranium beds. ³⁰⁴Within we met a gray old gentleman, who introduced himself as the lawyer, together with a bustling, rubicund inspector, who greeted Holmes as an old friend.

³⁰⁵"Well, Mr. Holmes, no chance for you in this case, I'm afraid. ³⁰⁶Just a common, ordinary burglary, and well within the capacity of the poor old police. ³⁰⁷No experts need apply."

³⁰⁸"I am sure the case is in very good hands," said Holmes. ³⁰⁹"Merely a common burglary, you say?"

³¹⁰"Quite so. ³¹¹We know pretty well who the men are and where to find them. ³¹²It is that gang of Barney Stockdale, with the big nigger in it—they've been seen about here."

³¹³"Excellent! ³¹⁴What did they get?"

³¹⁵"Well, they don't seem to have got much. ³¹⁶Mrs. Maberley was chloroformed and the house was—
³¹⁷Ah! here is the lady herself."

³¹⁸Our friend of yesterday, looking very pale and ill, had entered the room, leaning upon a little maidservant.

³¹⁹"You gave me good advice, Mr. Holmes," said she, smiling ruefully. ³²⁰"Alas, I did not take it! ³²¹I did not wish to trouble Mr. Sutro, and so I was unprotected."

³²²"I only heard of it this morning," the lawyer explained.

³²³"Mr. Holmes advised me to have some friend in the house. ³²⁴I neglected his advice, and I have paid for it."

³²⁵"You look wretchedly ill," said Holmes. ³²⁶"Perhaps you are hardly equal to telling me what occurred."

³²⁷"It is all here," said the inspector, tapping a bulky notebook.

³²⁸"Still, if the lady is not too exhausted—"

³²⁹“There is really so little to tell. ³³⁰I have no doubt that wicked Susan had planned an entrance for them. ³³¹They must have known the house to an inch. ³³²I was conscious for a moment of the chloroform rag which was thrust over my mouth, but I have no notion how long I may have been senseless. ³³³When I woke, one man was at the bedside and another was rising with a bundle in his hand from among my son's baggage, which was partially opened and littered over the floor. ³³⁴Before he could get away I sprang up and seized him.”

³³⁵“You took a big risk,” said the inspector.

³³⁶“I clung to him, but he shook me off, and the other may have struck me, for I can remember no more. ³³⁷Mary the maid heard the noise and began screaming out of the window. ³³⁸That brought the police, but the rascals had got away.”

³³⁹“What did they take?”

³⁴⁰“Well, I don't think there is anything of value missing. ³⁴¹I am sure there was nothing in my son's trunks.”

³⁴²“Did the men leave no clue?”

³⁴³“There was one sheet of paper which I may have torn from the man that I grasped. ³⁴⁴It was lying all crumpled on the floor. ³⁴⁵It is in my son's handwriting.”

³⁴⁶“Which means that it is not of much use,” said the inspector. ³⁴⁷“Now if it had been in the burglars—”

³⁴⁸“Exactly,” said Holmes. ³⁴⁹“What rugged common sense! ³⁵⁰None the less, I should be curious to see it.”

³⁵¹The inspector drew a folded sheet of foolscap from his pocketbook.

³⁵²“I never pass anything, however trifling,” said he with some pomposity. ³⁵³“That is my advice to you, Mr. Holmes. ³⁵⁴In twenty-five years' experience I have learned my lesson. ³⁵⁵There is always the chance of finger-marks or something.”

³⁵⁶Holmes inspected the sheet of paper.

³⁵⁷“What do you make of it, Inspector?”

³⁵⁸“Seems to be the end of some queer novel, so far as I can see.”

³⁵⁹“It may certainly prove to be the end of a queer tale,” said Holmes. ³⁶⁰“You have noticed the number on the top of the page. ³⁶¹It is two hundred and forty-five. ³⁶²Where are the odd two hundred and forty-four pages?”

³⁶³“Well, I suppose the burglars got those. ³⁶⁴Much good may it do them!”

³⁶⁵“It seems a queer thing to break into a house in order to steal such papers as that. ³⁶⁶Does it suggest anything to you, Inspector?”

³⁶⁷“Yes, sir, it suggests that in their hurry the rascals just grabbed at what came first to hand. ³⁶⁸I wish them joy of what they got.”

³⁶⁹“Why should they go to my son's things?” asked Mrs. Maberley.

³⁷⁰“Well, they found nothing valuable downstairs, so they tried their luck upstairs. ³⁷¹That is how I read it. ³⁷²What do you make of it, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁷³“I must think it over, Inspector. ³⁷⁴Come to the window, Watson.” ³⁷⁵Then, as we stood together, he read over the fragment of paper. ³⁷⁶It began in the middle of a sentence and ran like this:

³⁷⁷“... face bled considerably from the cuts and blows, but it was nothing to the bleeding of his heart as he saw that lovely face, the face for which he had been prepared to sacrifice his very life, looking out at his agony and humiliation. ³⁷⁸She smiled—yes, by Heaven! she smiled, like the heartless fiend she was, as he looked up at her. ³⁷⁹It was at that moment that love died and hate was born. ³⁸⁰Man must live for something. ³⁸¹If it is not for your embrace, my lady, then it shall surely be for your undoing and my complete revenge.”

³⁸²“Queer grammar!” said Holmes with a smile as he handed the paper back to the inspector. ³⁸³“Did you notice how the ‘he’ suddenly changed to ‘my’? ³⁸⁴The writer was so carried away by his own story that he imagined himself at the supreme moment to be the hero.”

³⁸⁵“It seemed mighty poor stuff,” said the inspector as he replaced it in his book. ³⁸⁶“What! are you off, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁸⁷“I don't think there is anything more for me to do now that the case is in such capable hands. ³⁸⁸By the way, Mrs. Mabberley, did you say you wished to travel?”

³⁸⁹“It has always been my dream, Mr. Holmes.”

³⁹⁰“Where would you like to go—Cairo, Madeira, the Riviera?”

³⁹¹“Oh, if I had the money I would go round the world.”

³⁹²“Quite so. ³⁹³Round the world. ³⁹⁴Well, good-morning. ³⁹⁵I may drop you a line in the evening.” ³⁹⁶As we passed the window I caught a glimpse of the inspector's smile and shake of the head. ³⁹⁷“These clever fellows have always a touch of madness.” ³⁹⁸That was what I read in the inspector's smile.

³⁹⁹“Now, Watson, we are at the last lap of our little journey,” said Holmes when we were back in the roar of central London once more. ⁴⁰⁰“I think we had best clear the matter up at once, and it would be well that you should come with me, for it is safer to have a witness when you are dealing with such a lady as Isadora Klein.”

⁴⁰¹We had taken a cab and were speeding to some address in Grosvenor Square. ⁴⁰²Holmes had been sunk in thought, but he roused himself suddenly.

⁴⁰³“By the way, Watson, I suppose you see it all clearly?”

⁴⁰⁴“No, I can't say that I do. ⁴⁰⁵I only gather that we are going to see the lady who is behind all this mischief.”

⁴⁰⁶“Exactly! ⁴⁰⁷But does the name Isadora Klein convey nothing to you? ⁴⁰⁸She was, of course, the celebrated beauty. ⁴⁰⁹There was never a woman to touch her. ⁴¹⁰She is pure Spanish, the real blood of the masterful Conquistadors, and her people have been leaders in Pernambuco for generations. ⁴¹¹She married the aged German sugar king, Klein, and presently found herself the richest as well as the most lovely widow upon earth. ⁴¹²Then there was an interval of adventure when she pleased her own tastes. ⁴¹³She had several lovers, and Douglas Mabberley, one of the most striking men in London, was one of them. ⁴¹⁴It was by all accounts more than an adventure with him. ⁴¹⁵He was not a society butterfly but a strong, proud man who gave and expected all. ⁴¹⁶But she is the ‘belle dame sans merci’ of fiction. ⁴¹⁷When her caprice is satisfied the matter is ended, and if the other party in the matter can't take her word for it she knows how to bring it home to him.”

⁴¹⁸“Then that was his own story—”

⁴¹⁹“Ah! you are piecing it together now. ⁴²⁰I hear that she is about to marry the young Duke of Lomond, who might almost be her son. ⁴²¹His Grace's ma might overlook the age, but a big scandal would be a different matter, so it is imperative— ⁴²²Ah! here we are.”

⁴²³It was one of the finest corner-houses of the West End. ⁴²⁴A machine-like footman took up our cards and returned with word that the lady was not at home. ⁴²⁵“Then we shall wait until she is,” said Holmes cheerfully.

⁴²⁶The machine broke down.

⁴²⁷“Not at home means not at home to you,” said the footman.

⁴²⁸“Good,” Holmes answered. ⁴²⁹“That means that we shall not have to wait. ⁴³⁰Kindly give this note to your mistress.”

⁴³¹He scribbled three or four words upon a sheet of his notebook, folded it, and handed it to the man.

⁴³²“What did you say, Holmes?” I asked.

⁴³³“I simply wrote: ‘Shall it be the police, then?’ ⁴³⁴I think that should pass us in.”

⁴³⁵It did—with amazing celerity. ⁴³⁶A minute later we were in an Arabian Nights drawing-room, vast and wonderful, in a half gloom, picked out with an occasional pink electric light. ⁴³⁷The lady had come, I felt, to that time of life when even the proudest beauty finds the half light more welcome. ⁴³⁸She rose from a settee as we entered: tall, queenly, a perfect figure, a lovely mask-like face, with two wonderful Spanish eyes which looked murder at us both.

⁴³⁹“What is this intrusion—and this insulting message?” she asked, holding up the slip of paper.

⁴⁴⁰“I need not explain, madame. ⁴⁴¹I have too much respect for your intelligence to do so—though I confess that intelligence has been surprisingly at fault of late.”

⁴⁴²“How so, sir?”

⁴⁴³“By supposing that your hired bullies could frighten me from my work. ⁴⁴⁴Surely no man would take up my profession if it were not that danger attracts him. ⁴⁴⁵It was you, then, who forced me to examine the case of young Maberley.”

⁴⁴⁶“I have no idea what you are talking about. ⁴⁴⁷What have I to do with hired bullies?”

⁴⁴⁸Holmes turned away wearily.

⁴⁴⁹“Yes, I have underrated your intelligence. ⁴⁵⁰Well, good-afternoon!”

⁴⁵¹“Stop! ⁴⁵²Where are you going?”

⁴⁵³“To Scotland Yard.”

⁴⁵⁴We had not got halfway to the door before she had overtaken us and was holding his arm. ⁴⁵⁵She had turned in a moment from steel to velvet.

⁴⁵⁶“Come and sit down, gentlemen. ⁴⁵⁷Let us talk this matter over. ⁴⁵⁸I feel that I may be frank with you, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁵⁹You have the feelings of a gentleman. ⁴⁶⁰How quick a woman's instinct is to find it out. ⁴⁶¹I will treat you as a friend.”

⁴⁶²“I cannot promise to reciprocate, madame. ⁴⁶³I am not the law, but I represent justice so far as my feeble powers go. ⁴⁶⁴I am ready to listen, and then I will tell you how I will act.”

⁴⁶⁵“No doubt it was foolish of me to threaten a brave man like yourself.”

⁴⁶⁶“What was really foolish, madame, is that you have placed yourself in the power of a band of rascals who may blackmail or give you away.”

⁴⁶⁷“No, no! ⁴⁶⁸I am not so simple. ⁴⁶⁹Since I have promised to be frank, I may say that no one, save Barney Stockdale and Susan, his wife, have the least idea who their employer is. ⁴⁷⁰As to them, well, it is not the first—” ⁴⁷¹She smiled and nodded with a charming coquettish intimacy.

⁴⁷²“I see. ⁴⁷³You've tested them before.”

⁴⁷⁴“They are good hounds who run silent.”

⁴⁷⁵“Such hounds have a way sooner or later of biting the hand that feeds them. ⁴⁷⁶They will be arrested for this burglary. ⁴⁷⁷The police are already after them.”

⁴⁷⁸“They will take what comes to them. ⁴⁷⁹That is what they are paid for. ⁴⁸⁰I shall not appear in the matter.”

⁴⁸¹“Unless I bring you into it.”

⁴⁸²“No, no, you would not. ⁴⁸³You are a gentleman. ⁴⁸⁴It is a woman's secret.”

⁴⁸⁵“In the first place, you must give back this manuscript.”

⁴⁸⁶She broke into a ripple of laughter and walked to the fireplace. ⁴⁸⁷There was a calcined mass which she broke up with the poker. ⁴⁸⁸“Shall I give this back?” she asked. ⁴⁸⁹So roguish and exquisite did she look as she stood before us with a challenging smile that I felt of all Holmes's criminals this was the one whom he would find it hardest to face. ⁴⁹⁰However, he was immune from sentiment.

⁴⁹¹“That seals your fate,” he said coldly. ⁴⁹²“You are very prompt in your actions, madame, but you have overdone it on this occasion.”

⁴⁹³She threw the poker down with a clatter.

⁴⁹⁴“How hard you are!” she cried. ⁴⁹⁵“May I tell you the whole story?”

⁴⁹⁶“I fancy I could tell it to you.”

⁴⁹⁷“But you must look at it with my eyes, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁹⁸You must realize it from the point of view of a woman who sees all her life's ambition about to be ruined at the last moment. ⁴⁹⁹Is such a woman to be blamed if she protects herself?”

⁵⁰⁰“The original sin was yours.”

⁵⁰¹“Yes, yes! ⁵⁰²I admit it. ⁵⁰³He was a dear boy, Douglas, but it so chanced that he could not fit into my plans. ⁵⁰⁴He wanted marriage—marriage, Mr. Holmes—with a penniless commoner. ⁵⁰⁵Nothing less would serve him. ⁵⁰⁶Then he became pertinacious. ⁵⁰⁷Because I had given he seemed to think that I still must give, and to him only. ⁵⁰⁸It was intolerable. ⁵⁰⁹At last I had to make him realize it.”

⁵¹⁰“By hiring ruffians to beat him under your own window.”

⁵¹¹“You do indeed seem to know everything. ⁵¹²Well, it is true. ⁵¹³Barney and the boys drove him away, and were, I admit, a little rough in doing so. ⁵¹⁴But what did he do then? ⁵¹⁵Could I have believed that a gentleman would do such an act? ⁵¹⁶He wrote a book in which he described his own story. ⁵¹⁷I, of course, was the wolf; he the lamb. ⁵¹⁸It was all there, under different names, of course; but who in all London would have failed to recognize it? ⁵¹⁹What do you say to that, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵²⁰“Well, he was within his rights.”

⁵²¹“It was as if the air of Italy had got into his blood and brought with it the old cruel Italian spirit. ⁵²²He wrote to me and sent me a copy of his book that I might have the torture of anticipation. ⁵²³There were two copies, he said—one for me, one for his publisher.”

⁵²⁴“How did you know the publisher's had not reached him?”

⁵²⁵“I knew who his publisher was. ⁵²⁶It is not his only novel, you know. ⁵²⁷I found out that he had not heard from Italy. ⁵²⁸Then came Douglas's sudden death. ⁵²⁹So long as that other manuscript was in the world there was no safety for me. ⁵³⁰Of course, it must be among his effects, and these would be returned to his mother. ⁵³¹I set the gang at work. ⁵³²One of them got into the house as servant. ⁵³³I wanted to do the thing honestly. ⁵³⁴I really and truly did. ⁵³⁵I was ready to buy the house and everything in it. ⁵³⁶I offered any price she cared to ask. ⁵³⁷I only tried the other way when everything else had failed. ⁵³⁸Now, Mr. Holmes, granting that I was too hard on Douglas—and, God knows, I am sorry for it!—what else could I do with my whole future at stake?”

⁵³⁹Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

⁵⁴⁰“Well, well,” said he, “I suppose I shall have to compound a felony as usual. ⁵⁴¹How much does it cost to go round the world in first-class style?”

⁵⁴²The lady stared in amazement.

⁵⁴³“Could it be done on five thousand pounds?”

⁵⁴⁴“Well, I should think so, indeed!”

⁵⁴⁵“Very good. ⁵⁴⁶I think you will sign me a check for that, and I will see that it comes to Mrs. Maberley. ⁵⁴⁷You owe her a little change of air. ⁵⁴⁸Meantime, lady”—he wagged a cautionary forefinger—“have a care! ⁵⁴⁹Have a care! ⁵⁵⁰You can't play with edged tools forever without cutting those dainty hands.”

The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

¹Holmes had read carefully a note which the last post had brought him. ²Then, with the dry chuckle which was his nearest approach to a laugh, he tossed it over to me.

³“For a mixture of the modern and the mediaeval, of the practical and of the wildly fanciful, I think this is surely the limit,” said he. ⁴“What do you make of it, Watson?”

⁵I read as follows:

⁶46, Old Jewry,

⁷Nov. 19th.

⁸Re Vampires

⁹Sir,

¹⁰Our client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, has made some inquiry from us in a communication of even date concerning vampires. ¹¹As our firm specializes entirely upon the assessment of machinery the matter hardly comes within our purview, and we have therefore recommended Mr. Ferguson to call upon you and lay the matter before you. ¹²We have not forgotten your successful action in the case of Matilda Briggs.

¹³We are, sir,

¹⁴Faithfully yours,

¹⁵Morrison, Morrison, and Dodd.

¹⁶per E. J. C.

¹⁷“Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson,” said Holmes in a reminiscent voice. ¹⁸“It was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared. ¹⁹But what do we know about vampires? ²⁰Does it come within our purview either? ²¹Anything is better than stagnation, but really we seem to have been switched on to a Grimms' fairy tale. ²²Make a long arm, Watson, and see what V has to say.”

²³I leaned back and took down the great index volume to which he referred. ²⁴Holmes balanced it on his knee, and his eyes moved slowly and lovingly over the record of old cases, mixed with the accumulated information of a lifetime.

²⁵“Voyage of the Gloria Scott,” he read. ²⁶“That was a bad business. ²⁷I have some recollection that you made a record of it, Watson, though I was unable to congratulate you upon the result. ²⁸Victor Lynch, the forger. ²⁹Venomous lizard or gila. ³⁰Remarkable case, that! ³¹Vittoria, the circus belle. ³²Vanderbilt and the Yeggman. ³³Vipers. ³⁴Vigor, the Hammersmith wonder. ³⁵Hullo! ³⁶Hullo! ³⁷Good old index. ³⁸You can't beat it. ³⁹Listen to this, Watson. ⁴⁰Vampirism in Hungary. ⁴¹And again, Vampires in Transylvania.” ⁴²He turned over the pages with eagerness, but after a short intent perusal he threw down the great book with a snarl of disappointment.

⁴³“Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! ⁴⁴What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? ⁴⁵It's pure lunacy.”

⁴⁶“But surely,” said I, “the vampire was not necessarily a dead man? ⁴⁷A living person might have the habit. ⁴⁸I have read, for example, of the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth.”

⁴⁹“You are right, Watson. ⁵⁰It mentions the legend in one of these references. ⁵¹But are we to give serious attention to such things? ⁵²This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. ⁵³The world is big enough for us. ⁵⁴No ghosts need apply. ⁵⁵I fear that we cannot take Mr. Robert Ferguson very seriously. ⁵⁶Possibly this note may be from him and may throw some light upon what is worrying him.”

⁵⁷He took up a second letter which had lain unnoticed upon the table while he had been absorbed with the first. ⁵⁸This he began to read with a smile of amusement upon his face which gradually faded away into an expression of intense interest and concentration. ⁵⁹When he had finished he sat for some little time lost in thought with the letter dangling from his fingers. ⁶⁰Finally, with a start, he aroused himself from his reverie.

⁶¹“Cheeseman's, Lamberley. ⁶²Where is Lamberley, Watson?”

⁶³“It is in Sussex, south of Horsham.”

⁶⁴“Not very far, eh? ⁶⁵And Cheeseman's?”

⁶⁶“I know that country, Holmes. ⁶⁷It is full of old houses which are named after the men who built them centuries ago. ⁶⁸You get Odley's and Harvey's and Carriton's—the folk are forgotten but their names live in their houses.

⁶⁹“Precisely,” said Holmes coldly. ⁷⁰It was one of the peculiarities of his proud, self-contained nature that though he docketed any fresh information very quietly and accurately in his brain, he seldom made any acknowledgment to the giver. ⁷¹“I rather fancy we shall know a good deal more about Cheeseman's, Lamberley, before we are through. ⁷²The letter is, as I had hoped, from Robert Ferguson. ⁷³By the way, he claims acquaintance with you.”

⁷⁴“With me!”

⁷⁵“You had better read it.”

⁷⁶He handed the letter across. ⁷⁷It was headed with the address quoted.

⁷⁸Dear Mr. Holmes [it said]:

⁷⁹I have been recommended to you by my lawyers, but indeed the matter is so extraordinarily delicate that it is most difficult to discuss. ⁸⁰It concerns a friend for whom I am acting. ⁸¹This gentleman married some five years ago a Peruvian lady, the daughter of a Peruvian merchant, whom he had met in connection with the importation of nitrates. ⁸²The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion always caused a separation of interests and of feelings between husband and wife, so that after a time his love may have cooled towards her and he may have come to regard their union as a mistake. ⁸³He felt there were sides of her character which he could never explore or understand. ⁸⁴This was the more painful as she was as loving a wife as a man could have—to all appearance absolutely devoted.

⁸⁵Now for the point which I will make more plain when we meet. ⁸⁶Indeed, this note is merely to give you a general idea of the situation and to ascertain whether you would care to interest yourself in the matter. ⁸⁷The lady began to show some curious traits quite alien to her ordinarily sweet and gentle disposition. ⁸⁸The gentleman had been married twice and he had one son by the first wife. ⁸⁹This boy was now fifteen, a very charming and affectionate youth, though unhappily injured through an accident in childhood. ⁹⁰Twice the wife was caught in the act of assaulting this poor lad in the most unprovoked way. ⁹¹Once she struck him with a stick and left a great weal on his arm.

⁹²This was a small matter, however, compared with her conduct to her own child, a dear boy just under one year of age. ⁹³On one occasion about a month ago this child had been left by its nurse for a few

minutes. ⁹⁴A loud cry from the baby, as of pain, called the nurse back. ⁹⁵As she ran into the room she saw her employer, the lady, leaning over the baby and apparently biting his neck. ⁹⁶There was a small ⁹⁷wound in the neck from which a stream of blood had escaped. ⁹⁸The nurse was so horrified that she wished to call the husband, but the lady implored her not to do so and actually gave her five pounds as a price for her silence. ⁹⁹No explanation was ever given, and for the moment the matter was passed over.

¹⁰⁰It left, however, a terrible impression upon the nurse's mind, and from that time she began to watch her mistress closely and to keep a closer guard upon the baby, whom she tenderly loved. ¹⁰¹It seemed to her that even as she watched the mother, so the mother watched her, and that every time she was compelled to leave the baby alone the mother was waiting to get at it. ¹⁰²Day and night the nurse covered the child, and day and night the silent, watchful mother seemed to be lying in wait as a wolf waits for a lamb. ¹⁰³It must read most incredible to you, and yet I beg you to take it seriously, for a child's life and a man's sanity may depend upon it.

¹⁰⁴At last there came one dreadful day when the facts could no longer be concealed from the husband. ¹⁰⁵The nurse's nerve had given way; she could stand the strain no longer, and she made a clean breast of it all to the man. ¹⁰⁶To him it seemed as wild a tale as it may now seem to you. ¹⁰⁷He knew his wife to be a loving wife, and, save for the assaults upon her stepson, a loving mother. ¹⁰⁸Why, then, should she wound her own dear little baby? ¹⁰⁹He told the nurse that she was dreaming, that her suspicions were those of a lunatic, and that such libels upon her mistress were not to be tolerated. ¹¹⁰While they were talking a sudden cry of pain was heard. ¹¹¹Nurse and master rushed together to the nursery. ¹¹²Imagine his feelings, Mr. Holmes, as he saw his wife rise from a kneeling position beside the cot and saw blood upon the child's exposed neck and upon the sheet. ¹¹³With a cry of horror, he turned his wife's face to the light and saw blood all round her lips. ¹¹⁴It was she—she beyond all question—who had drunk the poor baby's blood.

¹¹⁵So the matter stands. ¹¹⁶She is now confined to her room. ¹¹⁷There has been no explanation. ¹¹⁸The husband is half demented. ¹¹⁹He knows, and I know, little of vampirism beyond the name. ¹²⁰We had thought it was some wild tale of foreign parts. ¹²¹And yet here in the very heart of the English Sussex—well, all this can be discussed with you in the morning. ¹²²Will you see me? ¹²³Will you use your great powers in aiding a distracted man? ¹²⁴If so, kindly wire to Ferguson, Cheeseman's, Lamberley, and I will be at your rooms by ten o'clock.

¹²⁵Yours faithfully,

¹²⁶Robert Ferguson.

¹²⁷P. S. I believe your friend Watson played Rugby for Blackheath when I was three-quarter for Richmond. ¹²⁸It is the only personal introduction which I can give.

¹²⁹“Of course I remembered him,” said I as I laid down the letter. ¹³⁰“Big Bob Ferguson, the finest three-quarter Richmond ever had. ¹³¹He was always a good-natured chap. ¹³²It's like him to be so concerned over a friend's case.”

¹³³Holmes looked at me thoughtfully and shook his head.

¹³⁴“I never get your limits, Watson,” said he. ¹³⁵“There are unexplored possibilities about you. ¹³⁶Take a wire down, like a good fellow. ¹³⁷Will examine your case with pleasure.”

¹³⁸“Your case!”

¹³⁹“We must not let him think that this agency is a home for the weak-minded. ¹⁴⁰Of course it is his case.

¹⁴¹Send him that wire and let the matter rest till morning.”

¹⁴²Promptly at ten o'clock next morning Ferguson strode into our room. ¹⁴³I had remembered him as a long, slab-sided man with loose limbs and a fine turn of speed which had carried him round many an

opposing back. ¹⁴⁴There is surely nothing in life more painful than to meet the wreck of a fine athlete whom one has known in his prime. ¹⁴⁵His great frame had fallen in, his flaxen hair was scanty, and his shoulders were bowed. ¹⁴⁶I fear that I roused corresponding emotions in him.

¹⁴⁷"Hullo, Watson," said he, and his voice was still deep and hearty. ¹⁴⁸"You don't look quite the man you did when I threw you over the ropes into the crowd at the Old Deer Park. ¹⁴⁹I expect I have changed a bit also. ¹⁵⁰But it's this last day or two that has aged me. ¹⁵¹I see by your telegram, Mr. Holmes, that it is no use my pretending to be anyone's deputy."

¹⁵²"It is simpler to deal direct," said Holmes.

¹⁵³"Of course it is. ¹⁵⁴But you can imagine how difficult it is when you are speaking of the one woman whom you are bound to protect and help. ¹⁵⁵What can I do? ¹⁵⁶How am I to go to the police with such a story? ¹⁵⁷And yet the kiddies have got to be protected. ¹⁵⁸Is it madness, Mr. Holmes? ¹⁵⁹Is it something in the blood? ¹⁶⁰Have you any similar case in your experience? ¹⁶¹For God's sake, give me some advice, for I am at my wit's end."

¹⁶²"Very naturally, Mr. Ferguson. ¹⁶³Now sit here and pull yourself together and give me a few clear answers. ¹⁶⁴I can assure you that I am very far from being at my wit's end, and that I am confident we shall find some solution. ¹⁶⁵First of all, tell me what steps you have taken. ¹⁶⁶Is your wife still near the children?"

¹⁶⁷"We had a dreadful scene. ¹⁶⁸She is a most loving woman, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁶⁹If ever a woman loved a man with all her heart and soul, she loves me. ¹⁷⁰She was cut to the heart that I should have discovered this horrible, this incredible, secret. ¹⁷¹She would not even speak. ¹⁷²She gave no answer to my reproaches, save to gaze at me with a sort of wild, despairing look in her eyes. ¹⁷³Then she rushed to her room and locked herself in. ¹⁷⁴Since then she has refused to see me. ¹⁷⁵She has a maid who was with her before her marriage, Dolores by name—a friend rather than a servant. ¹⁷⁶She takes her food to her."

¹⁷⁷"Then the child is in no immediate danger?"

¹⁷⁸"Mrs. Mason, the nurse, has sworn that she will not leave it night or day. ¹⁷⁹I can absolutely trust her. ¹⁸⁰I am more uneasy about poor little Jack, for, as I told you in my note, he has twice been assaulted by her."

¹⁸¹"But never wounded?"

¹⁸²"No, she struck him savagely. ¹⁸³It is the more terrible as he is a poor little inoffensive cripple." ¹⁸⁴Ferguson's gaunt features softened as he spoke of his boy. ¹⁸⁵"You would think that the dear lad's condition would soften anyone's heart. ¹⁸⁶A fall in childhood and a twisted spine, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁸⁷But the dearest, most loving heart within."

¹⁸⁸Holmes had picked up the letter of yesterday and was reading it over. ¹⁸⁹"What other inmates are there in your house, Mr. Ferguson?"

¹⁹⁰"Two servants who have not been long with us. ¹⁹¹One stable-hand, Michael, who sleeps in the house. ¹⁹²My wife, myself, my boy Jack, baby, Dolores, and Mrs. Mason. ¹⁹³That is all."

¹⁹⁴"I gather that you did not know your wife well at the time of your marriage?"

¹⁹⁵"I had only known her a few weeks."

¹⁹⁶"How long had this maid Dolores been with her?"

¹⁹⁷"Some years."

¹⁹⁸"Then your wife's character would really be better known by Dolores than by you?"

¹⁹⁹“Yes, you may say so.”

²⁰⁰Holmes made a note.

²⁰¹“I fancy,” said he, “that I may be of more use at Lamberley than here. ²⁰²It is eminently a case for personal investigation. ²⁰³If the lady remains in her room, our presence could not annoy or inconvenience her. ²⁰⁴Of course, we would stay at the inn.”

²⁰⁵Ferguson gave a gesture of relief.

²⁰⁶“It is what I hoped, Mr. Holmes. ²⁰⁷There is an excellent train at two from Victoria if you could come.”

²⁰⁸“Of course we could come. ²⁰⁹There is a lull at present. ²¹⁰I can give you my undivided energies. ²¹¹Watson, of course, comes with us. ²¹²But there are one or two points upon which I wish to be very sure before I start. ²¹³This unhappy lady, as I understand it, has appeared to assault both the children, her own baby and your little son?”

²¹⁴“That is so.”

²¹⁵“But the assaults take different forms, do they not? ²¹⁶She has beaten your son.”

²¹⁷“Once with a stick and once very savagely with her hands.”

²¹⁸“Did she give no explanation why she struck him?”

²¹⁹“None save that she hated him. ²²⁰Again and again she said so.”

²²¹“Well, that is not unknown among stepmothers. ²²²A posthumous jealousy, we will say. ²²³Is the lady jealous by nature?”

²²⁴“Yes, she is very jealous—jealous with all the strength of her fiery tropical love.”

²²⁵“But the boy—he is fifteen, I understand, and probably very developed in mind, since his body has been circumscribed in action. ²²⁶Did he give you no explanation of these assaults?”

²²⁷“No, he declared there was no reason.”

²²⁸“Were they good friends at other times?”

²²⁹“No, there was never any love between them.”

²³⁰“Yet you say he is affectionate?”

²³¹“Never in the world could there be so devoted a son. ²³²My life is his life. ²³³He is absorbed in what I say or do.”

²³⁴Once again Holmes made a note. ²³⁵For some time he sat lost in thought.

²³⁶“No doubt you and the boy were great comrades before this second marriage. ²³⁷You were thrown very close together, were you not?”

²³⁸“Very much so.”

²³⁹“And the boy, having so affectionate a nature, was devoted, no doubt, to the memory of his mother?”

²⁴⁰“Most devoted.”

²⁴¹“He would certainly seem to be a most interesting lad. ²⁴²There is one other point about these assaults. ²⁴³Were the strange attacks upon the baby and the assaults upon your son at the same period?”

²⁴⁴“In the first case it was so. ²⁴⁵It was as if some frenzy had seized her, and she had vented her rage upon both. ²⁴⁶In the second case it was only Jack who suffered. ²⁴⁷Mrs. Mason had no complaint to make about the baby.”

²⁴⁸“That certainly complicates matters.”

²⁴⁹“I don't quite follow you, Mr. Holmes.”

²⁵⁰“Possibly not. ²⁵¹One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them. ²⁵²A bad habit, Mr. Ferguson, but human nature is weak. ²⁵³I fear that your old friend here has given an exaggerated view of my scientific methods. ²⁵⁴However, I will only say at the present stage that your problem does not appear to me to be insoluble, and that you may expect to find us at Victoria at two o'clock.”

²⁵⁵It was evening of a dull, foggy November day when, having left our bags at the Chequers, Lamberley, we drove through the Sussex clay of a long winding lane and finally reached the isolated and ancient farmhouse in which Ferguson dwelt. ²⁵⁶It was a large, straggling building, very old in the centre, very new at the wings with towering Tudor chimneys and a lichen-spotted, high-pitched roof of Horsham slabs. ²⁵⁷The doorsteps were worn into curves, and the ancient tiles which lined the porch were marked with the rebus of a cheese and a man after the original builder. ²⁵⁸Within, the ceilings were corrugated with heavy oaken beams, and the uneven floors sagged into sharp curves. ²⁵⁹An odour of age and decay pervaded the whole crumbling building.

²⁶⁰There was one very large central room into which Ferguson led us. ²⁶¹Here, in a huge old-fashioned fireplace with an iron screen behind it dated 1670, there blazed and spluttered a splendid log fire.

²⁶²The room, as I gazed round, was a most singular mixture of dates and of places. ²⁶³The half-panelled walls may well have belonged to the original yeoman farmer of the seventeenth century. ²⁶⁴They were ornamented, however, on the lower part by a line of well-chosen modern water-colours; while above, where yellow plaster took the place of oak, there was hung a fine collection of South American utensils and weapons, which had been brought, no doubt, by the Peruvian lady upstairs. ²⁶⁵Holmes rose, with that quick curiosity which sprang from his eager mind, and examined them with some care. ²⁶⁶He returned with his eyes full of thought.

²⁶⁷“Hullo!” he cried. ²⁶⁸“Hullo!”

²⁶⁹A spaniel had lain in a basket in the corner. ²⁷⁰It came slowly forward towards its master, walking with difficulty. ²⁷¹Its hind legs moved irregularly and its tail was on the ground. ²⁷²It licked Ferguson's hand.

²⁷³“What is it, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁷⁴“The dog. ²⁷⁵What's the matter with it?”

²⁷⁶“That's what puzzled the vet. ²⁷⁷A sort of paralysis. ²⁷⁸Spinal meningitis, he thought. ²⁷⁹But it is passing. ²⁸⁰He'll be all right soon—won't you, Carlo?”

²⁸¹A shiver of assent passed through the drooping tail. ²⁸²The dog's mournful eyes passed from one of us to the other. ²⁸³He knew that we were discussing his case.

²⁸⁴“Did it come on suddenly?”

²⁸⁵“In a single night.”

²⁸⁶“How long ago?”

²⁸⁷“It may have been four months ago.”

²⁸⁸“Very remarkable. ²⁸⁹Very suggestive.”

²⁹⁰“What do you see in it, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁹¹“A confirmation of what I had already thought.”

²⁹²“For God's sake, what do you think, Mr. Holmes? ²⁹³It may be a mere intellectual puzzle to you, but it is life and death to me! ²⁹⁴My wife a would-be murderer—my child in constant danger! ²⁹⁵Don't play with me, Mr. Holmes. ²⁹⁶It is too terribly serious.”

²⁹⁷The big Rugby three-quarter was trembling all over. ²⁹⁸Holmes put his hand soothingly upon his arm.

²⁹⁹“I fear that there is pain for you, Mr. Ferguson, whatever the solution may be,” said he. ³⁰⁰“I would spare you all I can. ³⁰¹I cannot say more for the instant, but before I leave this house I hope I may have something definite.”

³⁰²“Please God you may! ³⁰³If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will go up to my wife's room and see if there has been any change.”

³⁰⁴He was away some minutes, during which Holmes resumed his examination of the curiosities upon the wall. ³⁰⁵When our host returned it was clear from his downcast face that he had made no progress. ³⁰⁶He brought with him a tall, slim, brown-faced girl.

³⁰⁷“The tea is ready, Dolores,” said Ferguson. ³⁰⁸“See that your mistress has everything she can wish.”

³⁰⁹“She verra ill,” cried the girl, looking with indignant eyes at her master. ³¹⁰“She no ask for food. ³¹¹She verra ill. ³¹²She need doctor. ³¹³I frightened stay alone with her without doctor.”

³¹⁴Ferguson looked at me with a question in his eyes.

³¹⁵“I should be so glad if I could be of use.”

³¹⁶“Would your mistress see Dr. Watson?”

³¹⁷“I take him. ³¹⁸I no ask leave. ³¹⁹She needs doctor.”

³²⁰“Then I'll come with you at once.”

³²¹I followed the girl, who was quivering with strong emotion, up the staircase and down an ancient corridor. ³²²At the end was an iron-clamped and massive door. ³²³It struck me as I looked at it that if Ferguson tried to force his way to his wife he would find it no easy matter. ³²⁴The girl drew a key from her pocket, and the heavy oaken planks creaked upon their old hinges. ³²⁵I passed in and she swiftly followed, fastening the door behind her.

³²⁶On the bed a woman was lying who was clearly in a high fever. ³²⁷She was only half conscious, but as I entered she raised a pair of frightened but beautiful eyes and glared at me in apprehension. ³²⁸Seeing a stranger, she appeared to be relieved and sank back with a sigh upon the pillow. ³²⁹I stepped up to her with a few reassuring words, and she lay still while I took her pulse and temperature. ³³⁰Both were high, and yet my impression was that the condition was rather that of mental and nervous excitement than of any actual seizure.

³³¹“She lie like that one day, two day. ³³²I 'fraid she die,” said the girl.

³³³The woman turned her flushed and handsome face towards me.

³³⁴“Where is my husband?”

³³⁵“He is below and would wish to see you.”

³³⁶“I will not see him. ³³⁷I will not see him.” ³³⁸Then she seemed to wander off into delirium. ³³⁹“A fiend! ³⁴⁰A fiend! ³⁴¹Oh, what shall I do with this devil?”

³⁴²“Can I help you in any way?”

³⁴³“No. ³⁴⁴No one can help. ³⁴⁵It is finished. ³⁴⁶All is destroyed. ³⁴⁷Do what I will, all is destroyed.”

³⁴⁸The woman must have some strange delusion. ³⁴⁹I could not see honest Bob Ferguson in the character of fiend or devil.

³⁵⁰“Madame,” I said, “your husband loves you dearly. ³⁵¹He is deeply grieved at this happening.”

³⁵²Again she turned on me those glorious eyes.

³⁵³“He loves me. ³⁵⁴Yes. ³⁵⁵But do I not love him? ³⁵⁶Do I not love him even to sacrifice myself rather than break his dear heart? ³⁵⁷That is how I love him. ³⁵⁸And yet he could think of me—he could speak of me so.”

³⁵⁹“He is full of grief, but he cannot understand.”

³⁶⁰“No, he cannot understand. ³⁶¹But he should trust.”

³⁶²“Will you not see him?” I suggested.

³⁶³“No, no, I cannot forget those terrible words nor the look upon his face. ³⁶⁴I will not see him. ³⁶⁵Go now. ³⁶⁶You can do nothing for me. ³⁶⁷Tell him only one thing. ³⁶⁸I want my child. ³⁶⁹I have a right to my child. ³⁷⁰That is the only message I can send him.” ³⁷¹She turned her face to the wall and would say no more.

³⁷²I returned to the room downstairs, where Ferguson and Holmes still sat by the fire. ³⁷³Ferguson listened moodily to my account of the interview.

³⁷⁴“How can I send her the child?” he said. ³⁷⁵“How do I know what strange impulse might come upon her? ³⁷⁶How can I ever forget how she rose from beside it with its blood upon her lips?” ³⁷⁷He shuddered at the recollection. ³⁷⁸“The child is safe with Mrs. Mason, and there he must remain.”

³⁷⁹A smart maid, the only modern thing which we had seen in the house, had brought in some tea. ³⁸⁰As she was serving it the door opened and a youth entered the room. ³⁸¹He was a remarkable lad, pale-faced and fair-haired, with excitable light blue eyes which blazed into a sudden flame of emotion and joy as they rested upon his father. ³⁸²He rushed forward and threw his arms round his neck with the abandon of a loving girl.

³⁸³“Oh, daddy,” he cried, “I did not know that you were due yet. ³⁸⁴I should have been here to meet you. ³⁸⁵Oh, I am so glad to see you!”

³⁸⁶Ferguson gently disengaged himself from the embrace with some little show of embarrassment.

³⁸⁷“Dear old chap,” said he, patting the flaxen head with a very tender hand. ³⁸⁸“I came early because my friends, Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, have been persuaded to come down and spend an evening with us.”

³⁸⁹“Is that Mr. Holmes, the detective?”

³⁹⁰“Yes.”

³⁹¹The youth looked at us with a very penetrating and, as it seemed to me, unfriendly gaze.

³⁹²“What about your other child, Mr. Ferguson?” asked Holmes. ³⁹³“Might we make the acquaintance of the baby?”

³⁹⁴“Ask Mrs. Mason to bring baby down,” said Ferguson. ³⁹⁵The boy went off with a curious, shambling gait which told my surgical eyes that he was suffering from a weak spine. ³⁹⁶Presently he returned, and behind him came a tall, gaunt woman bearing in her arms a very beautiful child, dark-eyed, golden-haired, a wonderful mixture of the Saxon and the Latin. ³⁹⁷Ferguson was evidently devoted to it, for he took it into his arms and fondled it most tenderly.

³⁹⁸“Fancy anyone having the heart to hurt him,” he muttered as he glanced down at the small, angry red pucker upon the cherub throat.

³⁹⁹It was at this moment that I chanced to glance at Holmes and saw a most singular intentness in his expression. ⁴⁰⁰His face was as set as if it had been carved out of old ivory, and his eyes, which had glanced for a moment at father and child, were now fixed with eager curiosity upon something at the other side of the room. ⁴⁰¹Following his gaze I could only guess that he was looking out through the window at the melancholy, dripping garden. ⁴⁰²It is true that a shutter had half closed outside and obstructed the view, but none the less it was certainly at the window that Holmes was fixing his concentrated attention. ⁴⁰³Then he smiled, and his eyes came back to the baby. ⁴⁰⁴On its chubby neck there was this small puckered mark. ⁴⁰⁵Without speaking, Holmes examined it with care. ⁴⁰⁶Finally he shook one of the dimpled fists which waved in front of him.

⁴⁰⁷“Good-bye, little man. ⁴⁰⁸You have made a strange start in life. ⁴⁰⁹Nurse, I should wish to have a word with you in private.”

⁴¹⁰He took her aside and spoke earnestly for a few minutes. ⁴¹¹I only heard the last words, which were: ⁴¹²“Your anxiety will soon, I hope, be set at rest.” ⁴¹³The woman, who seemed to be a sour, silent kind of creature, withdrew with the child.

⁴¹⁴“What is Mrs. Mason like?” asked Holmes.

⁴¹⁵“Not very prepossessing externally, as you can see, but a heart of gold, and devoted to the child.”

⁴¹⁶“Do you like her, Jack?” ⁴¹⁷Holmes turned suddenly upon the boy. ⁴¹⁸His expressive mobile face shadowed over, and he shook his head.

⁴¹⁹“Jacky has very strong likes and dislikes,” said Ferguson, putting his arm round the boy. ⁴²⁰“Luckily I am one of his likes.”

⁴²¹The boy cooed and nestled his head upon his father's breast. ⁴²²Ferguson gently disengaged him.

⁴²³“Run away, little Jacky,” said he, and he watched his son with loving eyes until he disappeared. ⁴²⁴“Now, Mr. Holmes,” he continued when the boy was gone, “I really feel that I have brought you on a fool's errand, for what can you possibly do save give me your sympathy? ⁴²⁵It must be an exceedingly delicate and complex affair from your point of view.”

⁴²⁶“It is certainly delicate,” said my friend with an amused smile, “but I have not been struck up to now with its complexity. ⁴²⁷It has been a case for intellectual deduction, but when this original intellectual deduction is confirmed point by point by quite a number of independent incidents, then the subjective becomes objective and we can say confidently that we have reached our goal. ⁴²⁸I had, in fact, reached it before we left Baker Street, and the rest has merely been observation and confirmation.”

⁴²⁹Ferguson put his big hand to his furrowed forehead.

⁴³⁰“For heaven's sake, Holmes,” he said hoarsely; “if you can see the truth in this matter, do not keep me in suspense. ⁴³¹How do I stand? ⁴³²What shall I do? ⁴³³I care nothing as to how you have found your facts so long as you have really got them.”

⁴³⁴“Certainly I owe you an explanation, and you shall have it. ⁴³⁵But you will permit me to handle the matter in my own way? ⁴³⁶Is the lady capable of seeing us, Watson?”

⁴³⁷“She is ill, but she is quite rational.”

⁴³⁸“Very good. ⁴³⁹It is only in her presence that we can clear the matter up. ⁴⁴⁰Let us go up to her.”

⁴⁴¹“She will not see me,” cried Ferguson.

⁴⁴²“Oh, yes, she will,” said Holmes. ⁴⁴³He scribbled a few lines upon a sheet of paper. ⁴⁴⁴“You at least have the entree, Watson. ⁴⁴⁵Will you have the goodness to give the lady this note?”

⁴⁴⁶I ascended again and handed the note to Dolores, who cautiously opened the door. ⁴⁴⁷A minute later I heard a cry from within, a cry in which joy and surprise seemed to be blended. ⁴⁴⁸Dolores looked out.

⁴⁴⁹“She will see them. ⁴⁵⁰She will leesten,” said she.

⁴⁵¹At my summons Ferguson and Holmes came up. ⁴⁵²As we entered the room Ferguson took a step or two towards his wife, who had raised herself in the bed, but she held out her hand to repulse him. ⁴⁵³He sank into an armchair, while Holmes seated himself beside him, after bowing to the lady, who looked at him with wide-eyed amazement.

⁴⁵⁴“I think we can dispense with Dolores,” said Holmes. ⁴⁵⁵“Oh, very well, madame, if you would rather she stayed I can see no objection. ⁴⁵⁶Now, Mr. Ferguson, I am a busy man with many calls, and my methods have to be short and direct. ⁴⁵⁷The swiftest surgery is the least painful. ⁴⁵⁸Let me first say what will ease your mind. ⁴⁵⁹Your wife is a very good, a very loving, and a very ill-used woman.”

⁴⁶⁰Ferguson sat up with a cry of joy.

⁴⁶¹“Prove that, Mr. Holmes, and I am your debtor forever.”

⁴⁶²“I will do so, but in doing so I must wound you deeply in another direction.”

⁴⁶³“I care nothing so long as you clear my wife. ⁴⁶⁴Everything on earth is insignificant compared to that.”

⁴⁶⁵“Let me tell you, then, the train of reasoning which passed through my mind in Baker Street. ⁴⁶⁶The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. ⁴⁶⁷Such things do not happen in criminal practice in England. ⁴⁶⁸And yet your observation was precise. ⁴⁶⁹You had seen the lady rise from beside the child's cot with the blood upon her lips.”

⁴⁷⁰“I did.”

⁴⁷¹“Did it not occur to you that a bleeding wound may be sucked for some other purpose than to draw the blood from it? ⁴⁷²Was there not a queen in English history who sucked such a wound to draw poison from it?”

⁴⁷³“Poison!”

⁴⁷⁴“A South American household. ⁴⁷⁵My instinct felt the presence of those weapons upon the wall before my eyes ever saw them. ⁴⁷⁶It might have been other poison, but that was what occurred to me. ⁴⁷⁷When I saw that little empty quiver beside the small bird-bow, it was just what I expected to see. ⁴⁷⁸If the child were pricked with one of those arrows dipped in curare or some other devilish drug, it would mean death if the venom were not sucked out.

⁴⁷⁹“And the dog! ⁴⁸⁰If one were to use such a poison, would one not try it first in order to see that it had not lost its power? ⁴⁸¹I did not foresee the dog, but at least I understand him and he fitted into my reconstruction.

⁴⁸²“Now do you understand? ⁴⁸³Your wife feared such an attack. ⁴⁸⁴She saw it made and saved the child's life, and yet she shrank from telling you all the truth, for she knew how you loved the boy and feared lest it break your heart.”

⁴⁸⁵“Jacky!”

⁴⁸⁶“I watched him as you fondled the child just now. ⁴⁸⁷His face was clearly reflected in the glass of the window where the shutter formed a background. ⁴⁸⁸I saw such jealousy, such cruel hatred, as I have seldom seen in a human face.”

⁴⁸⁹“My Jacky!”

⁴⁹⁰“You have to face it, Mr. Ferguson. ⁴⁹¹It is the more painful because it is a distorted love, a maniacal exaggerated love for you, and possibly for his dead mother, which has prompted his action. ⁴⁹²His very soul is consumed with hatred for this splendid child, whose health and beauty are a contrast to his own weakness.”

⁴⁹³“Good God! ⁴⁹⁴It is incredible!”

⁴⁹⁵“Have I spoken the truth, madame?”

⁴⁹⁶The lady was sobbing, with her face buried in the pillows. ⁴⁹⁷Now she turned to her husband.

⁴⁹⁸“How could I tell you, Bob? ⁴⁹⁹I felt the blow it would be to you. ⁵⁰⁰It was better that I should wait and that it should come from some other lips than mine. ⁵⁰¹When this gentleman, who seems to have powers of magic, wrote that he knew all, I was glad.”

⁵⁰²“I think a year at sea would be my prescription for Master Jacky,” said Holmes, rising from his chair.

⁵⁰³“Only one thing is still clouded, madame. ⁵⁰⁴We can quite understand your attacks upon Master Jacky.

⁵⁰⁵There is a limit to a mother's patience. ⁵⁰⁶But how did you dare to leave the child these last two days?”

⁵⁰⁷“I had told Mrs. Mason. ⁵⁰⁸She knew.”

⁵⁰⁹“Exactly. ⁵¹⁰So I imagined.”

⁵¹¹Ferguson was standing by the bed, choking, his hands outstretched and quivering.

⁵¹²“This, I fancy, is the time for our exit, Watson,” said Holmes in a whisper. ⁵¹³“If you will take one elbow of the too faithful Dolores, I will take the other. ⁵¹⁴There, now,” he added as he closed the door behind him, “I think we may leave them to settle the rest among themselves.”

⁵¹⁵I have only one further note of this case. ⁵¹⁶It is the letter which Holmes wrote in final answer to that with which the narrative begins. ⁵¹⁷It ran thus:

⁵¹⁸Baker Street,

⁸¹⁹Nov. 21st.

⁵²⁰Re Vampires

⁵²¹Sir,

⁵²²Referring to your letter of the 19th, I beg to state that I have looked into the inquiry of your client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, and that the matter has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. ⁵²³With thanks for your recommendation, I am, sir,

⁵²⁴Faithfully yours,

⁵²⁵Sherlock Holmes.

The Adventure of the Three Garridebs

¹It may have been a comedy, or it may have been a tragedy. ²It cost one man his reason, it cost me a blood-letting, and it cost yet another man the penalties of the law. ³Yet there was certainly an element of comedy. ⁴Well, you shall judge for yourselves.

⁵I remember the date very well, for it was in the same month that Holmes refused a knighthood for services which may perhaps some day be described. ⁶I only refer to the matter in passing, for in my position of partner and confidant I am obliged to be particularly careful to avoid any indiscretion. ⁷I repeat, however, that this enables me to fix the date, which was the latter end of June, 1902, shortly after the conclusion of the South African War. ⁸Holmes had spent several days in bed, as was his habit from time to time, but he emerged that morning with a long foolscap document in his hand and a twinkle of amusement in his austere gray eyes.

⁹“There is a chance for you to make some money, friend Watson,” said he. ¹⁰“Have you ever heard the name of Garrideb?”

¹¹I admitted that I had not.

¹²“Well, if you can lay your hand upon a Garrideb, there's money in it.”

¹³“Why?”

¹⁴“Ah, that's a long story—rather a whimsical one, too. ¹⁵I don't think in all our explorations of human complexities we have ever come upon anything more singular. ¹⁶The fellow will be here presently for cross-examination, so I won't open the matter up till he comes. ¹⁷But, meanwhile, that's the name we want.”

¹⁸The telephone directory lay on the table beside me, and I turned over the pages in a rather hopeless quest. ¹⁹But to my amazement there was this strange name in its due place. ²⁰I gave a cry of triumph.

²¹“Here you are, Holmes! ²²Here it is!”

²³Holmes took the book from my hand.

²⁴“‘Garrideb, N.,’ ” he read, “‘136 Little Ryder Street, W.’ ²⁵Sorry to disappoint you, my dear Watson, but this is the man himself. ²⁶That is the address upon his letter. ²⁷We want another to match him.”

²⁸Mrs. Hudson had come in with a card upon a tray. ²⁹I took it up and glanced at it.

³⁰“Why, here it is!” I cried in amazement. ³¹“This is a different initial. ³²John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, Moorville, Kansas, U. S. A.”

³³Holmes smiled as he looked at the card. ³⁴“I am afraid you must make yet another effort, Watson,” said he. ³⁵“This gentleman is also in the plot already, though I certainly did not expect to see him this morning. ³⁶However, he is in a position to tell us a good deal which I want to know.”

³⁷A moment later he was in the room. ³⁸Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, was a short, powerful man with the round, fresh, clean-shaven face characteristic of so many American men of affairs. ³⁹The general effect was chubby and rather childlike, so that one received the impression of quite a young man with a broad set smile upon his face. ⁴⁰His eyes, however, were arresting. ⁴¹Seldom in any human head have I seen a pair which bespoke a more intense inward life, so bright were they, so alert, so responsive to every change of thought. ⁴²His accent was American, but was not accompanied by any eccentricity of speech.

⁴³“Mr. Holmes?” he asked, glancing from one to the other. ⁴⁴“Ah, yes! ⁴⁵Your pictures are not unlike you, sir, if I may say so. ⁴⁶I believe you have had a letter from my namesake, Mr. Nathan Garrideb, have you not?”

⁴⁷“Pray sit down,” said Sherlock Holmes. ⁴⁸“We shall, I fancy, have a good deal to discuss.” ⁴⁹He took up his sheets of foolscap. ⁵⁰“You are, of course, the Mr. John Garrideb mentioned in this document. ⁵¹But surely you have been in England some time?”

⁵²“Why do you say that, Mr. Holmes?” ⁵³I seemed to read sudden suspicion in those expressive eyes.

⁵⁴“Your whole outfit is English.”

⁵⁵Mr. Garrideb forced a laugh. ⁵⁶“I’ve read of your tricks, Mr. Holmes, but I never thought I would be the subject of them. ⁵⁷Where do you read that?”

⁵⁸“The shoulder cut of your coat, the toes of your boots—could anyone doubt it?”

⁵⁹“Well, well, I had no idea I was so obvious a Britisher. ⁶⁰But business brought me over here some time ago, and so, as you say, my outfit is nearly all London. ⁶¹However, I guess your time is of value, and we did not meet to talk about the cut of my socks. ⁶²What about getting down to that paper you hold in your hand?”

⁶³Holmes had in some way ruffled our visitor, whose chubby face had assumed a far less amiable expression.

⁶⁴“Patience! ⁶⁵Patience, Mr. Garrideb!” said my friend in a soothing voice. ⁶⁶“Dr. Watson would tell you that these little digressions of mine sometimes prove in the end to have some bearing on the matter. ⁶⁷But why did Mr. Nathan Garrideb not come with you?”

⁶⁸“Why did he ever drag you into it at all?” asked our visitor with a sudden outflame of anger. ⁶⁹“What in thunder had you to do with it? ⁷⁰Here was a bit of professional business between two gentlemen, and one of them must needs call in a detective! ⁷¹I saw him this morning, and he told me this fool-trick he had played me, and that’s why I am here. ⁷²But I feel bad about it, all the same.”

⁷³“There was no reflection upon you, Mr. Garrideb. ⁷⁴It was simply zeal upon his part to gain your end—an end which is, I understand, equally vital for both of you. ⁷⁵He knew that I had means of getting information, and, therefore, it was very natural that he should apply to me.”

⁷⁶Our visitor’s angry face gradually cleared.

⁷⁷“Well, that puts it different,” said he. ⁷⁸“When I went to see him this morning and he told me he had sent to a detective, I just asked for your address and came right away. ⁷⁹I don’t want police butting into a private matter. ⁸⁰But if you are content just to help us find the man, there can be no harm in that.”

⁸¹“Well, that is just how it stands,” said Holmes. ⁸²“And now, sir, since you are here, we had best have a clear account from your own lips. ⁸³My friend here knows nothing of the details.”

⁸⁴Mr. Garrideb surveyed me with not too friendly a gaze.

⁸⁵“Need he know?” he asked.

⁸⁶“We usually work together.”

⁸⁷“Well, there’s no reason it should be kept a secret. ⁸⁸I’ll give you the facts as short as I can make them.

⁸⁹If you came from Kansas I would not need to explain to you who Alexander Hamilton Garrideb was.

⁹⁰He made his money in real estate, and afterwards in the wheat pit at Chicago, but he spent it in buying up as much land as would make one of your counties, lying along the Arkansas River, west of Fort

Dodge. ⁹¹It's grazing-land and lumber-land and arable-land and mineralized-land, and just every sort of land that brings dollars to the man that owns it.

⁹²"He had no kith nor kin—or, if he had, I never heard of it. ⁹³But he took a kind of pride in the queerness of his name. ⁹⁴That was what brought us together. ⁹⁵I was in the law at Topeka, and one day I had a visit from the old man, and he was tickled to death to meet another man with his own name. ⁹⁶It was his pet fad, and he was dead set to find out if there were any more Garridebs in the world. ⁹⁷'Find me another!' said he. ⁹⁸I told him I was a busy man and could not spend my life hiking round the world in search of Garridebs. ⁹⁹'None the less,' said he, 'that is just what you will do if things pan out as I planned them.' ¹⁰⁰I thought he was joking, but there was a powerful lot of meaning in the words, as I was soon to discover.

¹⁰¹"For he died within a year of saying them, and he left a will behind him. ¹⁰²It was the queerest will that has ever been filed in the State of Kansas. ¹⁰³His property was divided into three parts, and I was to have one on condition that I found two Garridebs who would share the remainder. ¹⁰⁴It's five million dollars for each if it is a cent, but we can't lay a finger on it until we all three stand in a row.

¹⁰⁵"It was so big a chance that I just let my legal practice slide and I set forth looking for Garridebs. ¹⁰⁶There is not one in the United States. ¹⁰⁷I went through it, sir, with a fine-toothed comb and never a Garrideb could I catch. ¹⁰⁸Then I tried the old country. ¹⁰⁹Sure enough there was the name in the London telephone directory. ¹¹⁰I went after him two days ago and explained the whole matter to him. ¹¹¹But he is a lone man, like myself, with some women relations, but no men. ¹¹²It says three adult men in the will. ¹¹³So you see we still have a vacancy, and if you can help to fill it we will be very ready to pay your charges."

¹¹⁴"Well, Watson," said Holmes with a smile, "I said it was rather whimsical, did I not? ¹¹⁵I should have thought, sir, that your obvious way was to advertise in the agony columns of the papers."

¹¹⁶"I have done that, Mr. Holmes. ¹¹⁷No replies."

¹¹⁸"Dear me! ¹¹⁹Well, it is certainly a most curious little problem. ¹²⁰I may take a glance at it in my leisure. ¹²¹By the way, it is curious that you should have come from Topeka. ¹²²I used to have a correspondent—he is dead now—old Dr. Lysander Starr, who was mayor in 1890."

¹²³"Good old Dr. Starr!" said our visitor. ¹²⁴"His name is still honoured. ¹²⁵Well, Mr. Holmes, I suppose all we can do is to report to you and let you know how we progress. ¹²⁶I reckon you will hear within a day or two." ¹²⁷With this assurance our American bowed and departed.

¹²⁸Holmes had lit his pipe, and he sat for some time with a curious smile upon his face.

¹²⁹"Well?" I asked at last.

¹³⁰"I am wondering, Watson—just wondering!"

¹³¹"At what?"

¹³²Holmes took his pipe from his lips.

¹³³"I was wondering, Watson, what on earth could be the object of this man in telling us such a rigmarole of lies. ¹³⁴I nearly asked him so—for there are times when a brutal frontal attack is the best policy—but I judged it better to let him think he had fooled us. ¹³⁵Here is a man with an English coat frayed at the elbow and trousers bagged at the knee with a year's wear, and yet by this document and by his own account he is a provincial American lately landed in London. ¹³⁶There have been no advertisements in the agony columns. ¹³⁷You know that I miss nothing there. ¹³⁸They are my favourite covert for putting up a bird, and I would never have overlooked such a cock pheasant as that. ¹³⁹I never knew a Dr. Lysander Starr, of Topeka. ¹⁴⁰Touch him where you would he was false. ¹⁴¹I think the fellow is really

an American, but he has worn his accent smooth with years of London. ¹⁴²What is his game, then, and what motive lies behind this preposterous search for Garridebs? ¹⁴³It's worth our attention, for, granting that the man is a rascal, he is certainly a complex and ingenious one. ¹⁴⁴We must now find out if our other correspondent is a fraud also. ¹⁴⁵Just ring him up, Watson."

¹⁴⁶I did so, and heard a thin, quavering voice at the other end of the line.

¹⁴⁷"Yes, yes, I am Mr. Nathan Garrideb. ¹⁴⁸Is Mr. Holmes there? ¹⁴⁹I should very much like to have a word with Mr. Holmes."

¹⁵⁰My friend took the instrument and I heard the usual syncopated dialogue.

¹⁵¹"Yes, he has been here. ¹⁵²I understand that you don't know him. ... ¹⁵³How long? ... ¹⁵⁴Only two days! ... ¹⁵⁵Yes, yes, of course, it is a most captivating prospect. ¹⁵⁶Will you be at home this evening? ¹⁵⁷I suppose your namesake will not be there? ... ¹⁵⁸Very good, we will come then, for I would rather have a chat without him. ... ¹⁵⁹Dr. Watson will come with me. ... ¹⁶⁰I understand from your note that you did not go out often. ... ¹⁶¹Well, we shall be round about six. ¹⁶²You need not mention it to the American lawyer. ... ¹⁶³Very good. ¹⁶⁴Good-bye!"

¹⁶⁵It was twilight of a lovely spring evening, and even Little Ryder Street, one of the smaller offshoots from the Edgware Road, within a stone-cast of old Tyburn Tree of evil memory, looked golden and wonderful in the slanting rays of the setting sun. ¹⁶⁶The particular house to which we were directed was a large, old-fashioned, Early Georgian edifice, with a flat brick face broken only by two deep bay windows on the ground floor. ¹⁶⁷It was on this ground floor that our client lived, and, indeed, the low windows proved to be the front of the huge room in which he spent his waking hours. ¹⁶⁸Holmes pointed as we passed to the small brass plate which bore the curious name.

¹⁶⁹"Up some years, Watson," he remarked, indicating its discoloured surface. ¹⁷⁰"It's his real name, anyhow, and that is something to note."

¹⁷¹The house had a common stair, and there were a number of names painted in the hall, some indicating offices and some private chambers. ¹⁷²It was not a collection of residential flats, but rather the abode of Bohemian bachelors. ¹⁷³Our client opened the door for us himself and apologized by saying that the woman in charge left at four o'clock. ¹⁷⁴Mr. Nathan Garrideb proved to be a very tall, loose-jointed, round-backed person, gaunt and bald, some sixty-odd years of age. ¹⁷⁵He had a cadaverous face, with the dull dead skin of a man to whom exercise was unknown. ¹⁷⁶Large round spectacles and a small projecting goat's beard combined with his stooping attitude to give him an expression of peering curiosity. ¹⁷⁷The general effect, however, was amiable, though eccentric.

¹⁷⁸The room was as curious as its occupant. ¹⁷⁹It looked like a small museum. ¹⁸⁰It was both broad and deep, with cupboards and cabinets all round, crowded with specimens, geological and anatomical. ¹⁸¹Cases of butterflies and moths flanked each side of the entrance. ¹⁸²A large table in the centre was littered with all sorts of debris, while the tall brass tube of a powerful microscope bristled up among them. ¹⁸³As I glanced round I was surprised at the universality of the man's interests. ¹⁸⁴Here was a case of ancient coins. ¹⁸⁵There was a cabinet of flint instruments. ¹⁸⁶Behind his central table was a large cupboard of fossil bones. ¹⁸⁷Above was a line of plaster skulls with such names as "Neanderthal," "Heidelberg," "Cro-Magnon" printed beneath them. ¹⁸⁸It was clear that he was a student of many subjects. ¹⁸⁹As he stood in front of us now, he held a piece of chamois leather in his right hand with which he was polishing a coin.

¹⁹⁰"Syracusan—of the best period," he explained, holding it up. ¹⁹¹"They degenerated greatly towards the end. ¹⁹²At their best I hold them supreme, though some prefer the Alexandrian school. ¹⁹³You will find a chair here, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁹⁴Pray allow me to clear these bones. ¹⁹⁵And you, sir—ah, yes, Dr. Watson—if you would have the goodness to put the Japanese vase to one side. ¹⁹⁶You see round me my

little interests in life. ¹⁹⁷My doctor lectures me about never going out, but why should I go out when I have so much to hold me here? ¹⁹⁸I can assure you that the adequate cataloguing of one of those cabinets would take me three good months.”

¹⁹⁹Holmes looked round him with curiosity.

²⁰⁰“But do you tell me that you never go out?” he said.

²⁰¹“Now and again I drive down to Sotheby's or Christie's. ²⁰²Otherwise I very seldom leave my room. ²⁰³I am not too strong, and my researches are very absorbing. ²⁰⁴But you can imagine, Mr. Holmes, what a terrific shock—pleasant but terrific—it was for me when I heard of this unparalleled good fortune. ²⁰⁵It only needs one more Garrideb to complete the matter, and surely we can find one. ²⁰⁶I had a brother, but he is dead, and female relatives are disqualified. ²⁰⁷But there must surely be others in the world. ²⁰⁸I had heard that you handled strange cases, and that was why I sent to you. ²⁰⁹Of course, this American gentleman is quite right, and I should have taken his advice first, but I acted for the best.”

²¹⁰“I think you acted very wisely indeed,” said Holmes. ²¹¹“But are you really anxious to acquire an estate in America?”

²¹²“Certainly not, sir. ²¹³Nothing would induce me to leave my collection. ²¹⁴But this gentleman has assured me that he will buy me out as soon as we have established our claim. ²¹⁵Five million dollars was the sum named. ²¹⁶There are a dozen specimens in the market at the present moment which fill gaps in my collection, and which I am unable to purchase for want of a few hundred pounds. ²¹⁷Just think what I could do with five million dollars. ²¹⁸Why, I have the nucleus of a national collection. ²¹⁹I shall be the Hans Sloane of my age.”

²²⁰His eyes gleamed behind his great spectacles. ²²¹It was very clear that no pains would be spared by Mr. Nathan Garrideb in finding a namesake.

²²²“I merely called to make your acquaintance, and there is no reason why I should interrupt your studies,” said Holmes. ²²³“I prefer to establish personal touch with those with whom I do business. ²²⁴There are few questions I need ask, for I have your very clear narrative in my pocket, and I filled up the blanks when this American gentleman called. ²²⁵I understand that up to this week you were unaware of his existence.”

²²⁶“That is so. ²²⁷He called last Tuesday.”

²²⁸“Did he tell you of our interview to-day?”

²²⁹“Yes, he came straight back to me. ²³⁰He had been very angry.”

²³¹“Why should he be angry?”

²³²“He seemed to think it was some reflection on his honour. ²³³But he was quite cheerful again when he returned.”

²³⁴“Did he suggest any course of action?”

²³⁵“No, sir, he did not.”

²³⁶“Has he had, or asked for, any money from you?”

²³⁷“No, sir, never!”

²³⁸“You see no possible object he has in view?”

²³⁹“None, except what he states.”

²⁴⁰“Did you tell him of our telephone appointment?”

²⁴¹“Yes, sir, I did.”

²⁴²Holmes was lost in thought. ²⁴³I could see that he was puzzled.

²⁴⁴“Have you any articles of great value in your collection?”

²⁴⁵“No, sir. ²⁴⁶I am not a rich man. ²⁴⁷It is a good collection, but not a very valuable one.”

²⁴⁸“You have no fear of burglars?”

²⁴⁹“Not the least.”

²⁵⁰“How long have you been in these rooms?”

²⁵¹“Nearly five years.”

²⁵²Holmes's cross-examination was interrupted by an imperative knocking at the door. ²⁵³No sooner had our client unlatched it than the American lawyer burst excitedly into the room.

²⁵⁴“Here you are!” he cried, waving a paper over his head. ²⁵⁵“I thought I should be in time to get you.

²⁵⁶Mr. Nathan Garrideb, my congratulations! ²⁵⁷You are a rich man, sir. ²⁵⁸Our business is happily finished and all is well. ²⁵⁹As to you, Mr. Holmes, we can only say we are sorry if we have given you any useless trouble.”

²⁶⁰He handed over the paper to our client, who stood staring at a marked advertisement. ²⁶¹Holmes and I leaned forward and read it over his shoulder. ²⁶²This is how it ran:

²⁶³Howard Garrideb

²⁶⁴Constructor of Agricultural Machinery

²⁶⁵Binders, reapers, steam and hand plows, drills, harrows, farmers' carts, buckboards, and all other appliances.

²⁶⁶Estimates for Artesian Wells

²⁶⁷Apply Grosvenor Buildings, Aston

²⁶⁸“Glorious!” gasped our host. ²⁶⁹“That makes our third man.”

²⁷⁰“I had opened up inquiries in Birmingham,” said the American, “and my agent there has sent me this advertisement from a local paper. ²⁷¹We must hustle and put the thing through. ²⁷²I have written to this man and told him that you will see him in his office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock.”

²⁷³“You want me to see him?”

²⁷⁴“What do you say, Mr. Holmes? ²⁷⁵Don't you think it would be wiser? ²⁷⁶Here am I, a wandering American with a wonderful tale. ²⁷⁷Why should he believe what I tell him? ²⁷⁸But you are a Britisher with solid references, and he is bound to take notice of what you say. ²⁷⁹I would go with you if you wished, but I have a very busy day to-morrow, and I could always follow you if you are in any trouble.”

²⁸⁰“Well, I have not made such a journey for years.”

²⁸¹“It is nothing, Mr. Garrideb. ²⁸²I have figured out your connections. ²⁸³You leave at twelve and should be there soon after two. ²⁸⁴Then you can be back the same night. ²⁸⁵All you have to do is to see this man, explain the matter, and get an affidavit of his existence. ²⁸⁶By the Lord!” he added hotly, “considering I've come all the way from the centre of America, it is surely little enough if you go a hundred miles in order to put this matter through.”

²⁸⁷“Quite so,” said Holmes. ²⁸⁸“I think what this gentleman says is very true.”

²⁸⁹Mr. Nathan Garrideb shrugged his shoulders with a disconsolate air. ²⁹⁰“Well, if you insist I shall go,” said he. ²⁹¹“It is certainly hard for me to refuse you anything, considering the glory of hope that you have brought into my life.”

²⁹²“Then that is agreed,” said Holmes, “and no doubt you will let me have a report as soon as you can.”

²⁹³“I’ll see to that,” said the American. ²⁹⁴“Well,” he added, looking at his watch, “I’ll have to get on.

²⁹⁵I’ll call to-morrow, Mr. Nathan, and see you off to Birmingham. ²⁹⁶Coming my way, Mr. Holmes?

²⁹⁷Well, then, good-bye, and we may have good news for you to-morrow night.”

²⁹⁸I noticed that my friend’s face cleared when the American left the room, and the look of thoughtful perplexity had vanished.

²⁹⁹“I wish I could look over your collection, Mr. Garrideb,” said he. ³⁰⁰“In my profession all sorts of odd knowledge comes useful, and this room of yours is a storehouse of it.”

³⁰¹Our client shone with pleasure and his eyes gleamed from behind his big glasses.

³⁰²“I had always heard, sir, that you were a very intelligent man,” said he. ³⁰³“I could take you round now if you have the time.”

³⁰⁴“Unfortunately, I have not. ³⁰⁵But these specimens are so well labelled and classified that they hardly need your personal explanation. ³⁰⁶If I should be able to look in to-morrow, I presume that there would be no objection to my glancing over them?”

³⁰⁷“None at all. ³⁰⁸You are most welcome. ³⁰⁹The place will, of course, be shut up, but Mrs. Saunders is in the basement up to four o’clock and would let you in with her key.”

³¹⁰Well, I happen to be clear to-morrow afternoon. ³¹¹If you would say a word to Mrs. Saunders it would be quite in order. ³¹²By the way, who is your house-agent?”

³¹³Our client was amazed at the sudden question.

³¹⁴“Holloway and Steele, in the Edgware Road. ³¹⁵But why?”

³¹⁶“I am a bit of an archaeologist myself when it comes to houses,” said Holmes, laughing. ³¹⁷“I was wondering if this was Queen Anne or Georgian.”

³¹⁸“Georgian, beyond doubt.”

³¹⁹“Really. ³²⁰I should have thought a little earlier. ³²¹However, it is easily ascertained. ³²²Well, good-bye, Mr. Garrideb, and may you have every success in your Birmingham journey.”

³²³The house-agent’s was close by, but we found that it was closed for the day, so we made our way back to Baker Street. ³²⁴It was not till after dinner that Holmes reverted to the subject.

³²⁵“Our little problem draws to a close,” said he. ³²⁶“No doubt you have outlined the solution in your own mind.”

³²⁷“I can make neither head nor tail of it.”

³²⁸“The head is surely clear enough and the tail we should see to-morrow. ³²⁹Did you notice nothing curious about that advertisement?”

³³⁰“I saw that the word ‘plough’ was misspelt.”

³³¹“Oh, you did notice that, did you? ³³²Come, Watson, you improve all the time. ³³³Yes, it was bad English but good American. ³³⁴The printer had set it up as received. ³³⁵Then the buckboards. ³³⁶That is

American also.³³⁷ And artesian wells are commoner with them than with us.³³⁸ It was a typical American advertisement, but purporting to be from an English firm.³³⁹ What do you make of that?"

³⁴⁰"I can only suppose that this American lawyer put it in himself.³⁴¹ What his object was I fail to understand."

³⁴²"Well, there are alternative explanations.³⁴³ Anyhow, he wanted to get this good old fossil up to Birmingham.³⁴⁴ That is very clear.³⁴⁵ I might have told him that he was clearly going on a wild-goose chase, but, on second thoughts, it seemed better to clear the stage by letting him go.³⁴⁶ To-morrow, Watson—well, to-morrow will speak for itself."

³⁴⁷Holmes was up and out early.³⁴⁸ When he returned at lunchtime I noticed that his face was very grave.

³⁴⁹"This is a more serious matter than I had expected, Watson," said he.³⁵⁰ "It is fair to tell you so, though I know it will only be an additional reason to you for running your head into danger.³⁵¹ I should know my Watson by now.³⁵² But there is danger, and you should know it."

³⁵³"Well, it is not the first we have shared, Holmes.³⁵⁴ I hope it may not be the last.³⁵⁵ What is the particular danger this time?"

³⁵⁶"We are up against a very hard case.³⁵⁷ I have identified Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law.³⁵⁸ He is none other than 'Killer' Evans, of sinister and murderous reputation."

³⁵⁹"I fear I am none the wiser."

³⁶⁰"Ah, it is not part of your profession to carry about a portable Newgate Calendar in your memory.

³⁶¹I have been down to see friend Lestrade at the Yard.³⁶² There may be an occasional want of imaginative intuition down there, but they lead the world for thoroughness and method.³⁶³ I had an idea that we might get on the track of our American friend in their records.³⁶⁴ Sure enough, I found his chubby face smiling up at me from the rogues' portrait gallery.³⁶⁵ 'James Winter, alias Morecroft, alias Killer Evans,' was the inscription below."³⁶⁶ Holmes drew an envelope from his pocket.³⁶⁷ "I scribbled down a few points from his dossier:³⁶⁸ Aged forty-four.³⁶⁹ Native of Chicago.³⁷⁰ Known to have shot three men in the States.³⁷¹ Escaped from penitentiary through political influence.³⁷² Came to London in 1893.³⁷³ Shot a man over cards in a night-club in the Waterloo Road in January, 1895.³⁷⁴ Man died, but he was shown to have been the aggressor in the row.³⁷⁵ Dead man was identified as Rodger Prescott, famous as forger and coiner in Chicago.³⁷⁶ Killer Evans released in 1901.³⁷⁷ Has been under police supervision since, but so far as known has led an honest life.³⁷⁸ Very dangerous man, usually carries arms and is prepared to use them.³⁷⁹ That is our bird, Watson—a sporting bird, as you must admit."

³⁸⁰"But what is his game?"

³⁸¹"Well, it begins to define itself.³⁸² I have been to the house-agent's.³⁸³ Our client, as he told us, has been there five years.³⁸⁴ It was unlet for a year before then.³⁸⁵ The previous tenant was a gentleman at large named Waldron.³⁸⁶ Waldron's appearance was well remembered at the office.³⁸⁷ He had suddenly vanished and nothing more been heard of him.³⁸⁸ He was a tall, bearded man with very dark features.³⁸⁹ Now, Prescott, the man whom Killer Evans had shot, was, according to Scotland Yard, a tall, dark man with a beard.³⁹⁰ As a working hypothesis, I think we may take it that Prescott, the American criminal, used to live in the very room which our innocent friend now devotes to his museum.³⁹¹ So at last we get a link, you see."

³⁹²"And the next link?"

³⁹³"Well, we must go now and look for that."

³⁹⁴He took a revolver from the drawer and handed it to me.

³⁹⁵“I have my old favourite with me. ³⁹⁶If our Wild West friend tries to live up to his nickname, we must be ready for him. ³⁹⁷I’ll give you an hour for a siesta, Watson, and then I think it will be time for our Ryder Street adventure.”

³⁹⁸It was just four o’clock when we reached the curious apartment of Nathan Garrideb. ³⁹⁹Mrs. Saunders, the caretaker, was about to leave, but she had no hesitation in admitting us, for the door shut with a spring lock, and Holmes promised to see that all was safe before we left. ⁴⁰⁰Shortly afterwards the outer door closed, her bonnet passed the bow window, and we knew that we were alone in the lower floor of the house. ⁴⁰¹Holmes made a rapid examination of the premises. ⁴⁰²There was one cupboard in a dark corner which stood out a little from the wall. ⁴⁰³It was behind this that we eventually crouched while Holmes in a whisper outlined his intentions.

⁴⁰⁴“He wanted to get our amiable friend out of his room—that is very clear, and, as the collector never went out, it took some planning to do it. ⁴⁰⁵The whole of this Garrideb invention was apparently for no other end. ⁴⁰⁶I must say, Watson, that there is a certain devilish ingenuity about it, even if the queer name of the tenant did give him an opening which he could hardly have expected. ⁴⁰⁷He wove his plot with remarkable cunning.”

⁴⁰⁸“But what did he want?”

⁴⁰⁹“Well, that is what we are here to find out. ⁴¹⁰It has nothing whatever to do with our client, so far as I can read the situation. ⁴¹¹It is something connected with the man he murdered—the man who may have been his confederate in crime. ⁴¹²There is some guilty secret in the room. ⁴¹³That is how I read it. ⁴¹⁴At first I thought our friend might have something in his collection more valuable than he knew—something worth the attention of a big criminal. ⁴¹⁵But the fact that Rodger Prescott of evil memory inhabited these rooms points to some deeper reason. ⁴¹⁶Well, Watson, we can but possess our souls in patience and see what the hour may bring.”

⁴¹⁷That hour was not long in striking. ⁴¹⁸We crouched closer in the shadow as we heard the outer door open and shut. ⁴¹⁹Then came the sharp, metallic snap of a key, and the American was in the room. ⁴²⁰He closed the door softly behind him, took a sharp glance around him to see that all was safe, threw off his overcoat, and walked up to the central table with the brisk manner of one who knows exactly what he has to do and how to do it. ⁴²¹He pushed the table to one side, tore up the square of carpet on which it rested, rolled it completely back, and then, drawing a jemmy from his inside pocket, he knelt down and worked vigorously upon the floor. ⁴²²Presently we heard the sound of sliding boards, and an instant later a square had opened in the planks. ⁴²³Killer Evans struck a match, lit a stump of candle, and vanished from our view.

⁴²⁴Clearly our moment had come. ⁴²⁵Holmes touched my wrist as a signal, and together we stole across to the open trap-door. ⁴²⁶Gently as we moved, however, the old floor must have creaked under our feet, for the head of our American, peering anxiously round, emerged suddenly from the open space. ⁴²⁷His face turned upon us with a glare of baffled rage, which gradually softened into a rather shamefaced grin as he realized that two pistols were pointed at his head.

⁴²⁸“Well, well!” said he coolly as he scrambled to the surface. ⁴²⁹“I guess you have been one too many for me, Mr. Holmes. ⁴³⁰Saw through my game, I suppose, and played me for a sucker from the first. ⁴³¹Well, sir, I hand it to you; you have me beat and—”

⁴³²In an instant he had whisked out a revolver from his breast and had fired two shots. ⁴³³I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron had been pressed to my thigh. ⁴³⁴There was a crash as Holmes’s pistol came down on the man’s head. ⁴³⁵I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. ⁴³⁶Then my friend’s wiry arms were round me, and he was leading me to a chair.

⁴³⁷“You're not hurt, Watson? ⁴³⁸For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!”

⁴³⁹It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. ⁴⁴⁰The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. ⁴⁴¹For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. ⁴⁴²All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

⁴⁴³“It's nothing, Holmes. ⁴⁴⁴It's a mere scratch.”

⁴⁴⁵He had ripped up my trousers with his pocket-knife.

⁴⁴⁶“You are right,” he cried with an immense sigh of relief. ⁴⁴⁷“It is quite superficial.” ⁴⁴⁸His face set like flint as he glared at our prisoner, who was sitting up with a dazed face. ⁴⁴⁹“By the Lord, it is as well for you. ⁴⁵⁰If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive. ⁴⁵¹Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?”

⁴⁵²He had nothing to say for himself. ⁴⁵³He only sat and scowled. ⁴⁵⁴I leaned on Holmes's arm, and together we looked down into the small cellar which had been disclosed by the secret flap. ⁴⁵⁵It was still illuminated by the candle which Evans had taken down with him. ⁴⁵⁶Our eyes fell upon a mass of rusted machinery, great rolls of paper, a litter of bottles, and, neatly arranged upon a small table, a number of neat little bundles.

⁴⁵⁷“A printing press—a counterfeiter's outfit,” said Holmes.

⁴⁵⁸“Yes, sir,” said our prisoner, staggering slowly to his feet and then sinking into the chair. ⁴⁵⁹“The greatest counterfeiter London ever saw. ⁴⁶⁰That's Prescott's machine, and those bundles on the table are two thousand of Prescott's notes worth a hundred each and fit to pass anywhere. ⁴⁶¹Help yourselves, gentlemen. ⁴⁶²Call it a deal and let me beat it.”

⁴⁶³Holmes laughed.

⁴⁶⁴“We don't do things like that, Mr. Evans. ⁴⁶⁵There is no bolt-hole for you in this country. ⁴⁶⁶You shot this man Prescott, did you not?”

⁴⁶⁷“Yes, sir, and got five years for it, though it was he who pulled on me. ⁴⁶⁸Five years—when I should have had a medal the size of a soup plate. ⁴⁶⁹No living man could tell a Prescott from a Bank of England, and if I hadn't put him out he would have flooded London with them. ⁴⁷⁰I was the only one in the world who knew where he made them. ⁴⁷¹Can you wonder that I wanted to get to the place? ⁴⁷²And can you wonder that when I found this crazy boob of a bug-hunter with the queer name squatting right on the top of it, and never quitting his room, I had to do the best I could to shift him? ⁴⁷³Maybe I would have been wiser if I had put him away. ⁴⁷⁴It would have been easy enough, but I'm a soft-hearted guy that can't begin shooting unless the other man has a gun also. ⁴⁷⁵But say, Mr. Holmes, what have I done wrong, anyhow? ⁴⁷⁶I've not used this plant. ⁴⁷⁷I've not hurt this old stiff. ⁴⁷⁸Where do you get me?”

⁴⁷⁹“Only attempted murder, so far as I can see,” said Holmes. ⁴⁸⁰“But that's not our job. ⁴⁸¹They take that at the next stage. ⁴⁸²What we wanted at present was just your sweet self. ⁴⁸³Please give the Yard a call, Watson. ⁴⁸⁴It won't be entirely unexpected.”

⁴⁸⁵So those were the facts about Killer Evans and his remarkable invention of the three Garridebs. ⁴⁸⁶We heard later that our poor old friend never got over the shock of his dissipated dreams. ⁴⁸⁷When his castle in the air fell down, it buried him beneath the ruins. ⁴⁸⁸He was last heard of at a nursing-home in Brixton. ⁴⁸⁹It was a glad day at the Yard when the Prescott outfit was discovered, for, though they knew that it existed, they had never been able, after the death of the man, to find out where it was. ⁴⁹⁰Evans had indeed done great service and caused several worthy C. I. D. men to sleep the sounder, for the counterfeiter stands in a class by himself as a public danger. ⁴⁹¹They would willingly have subscribed

to that soup-plate medal of which the criminal had spoken, but an unappreciative bench took a less favourable view, and the Killer returned to those shades from which he had just emerged.

The Problem of Thor Bridge

¹Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box with my name, John H. Watson, M.D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid. ²It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr. Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine. ³Some, and not the least interesting, were complete failures, and as such will hardly bear narrating, since no final explanation is forthcoming. ⁴A problem without a solution may interest the student, but can hardly fail to annoy the casual reader. ⁵Among these unfinished tales is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world. ⁶No less remarkable is that of the cutter Alicia, which sailed one spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew. ⁷A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science. ⁸Apart from these unfathomed cases, there are some which involve the secrets of private families to an extent which would mean consternation in many exalted quarters if it were thought possible that they might find their way into print. ⁹I need not say that such a breach of confidence is unthinkable, and that these records will be separated and destroyed now that my friend has time to turn his energies to the matter. ¹⁰There remain a considerable residue of cases of greater or less interest which I might have edited before had I not feared to give the public a surfeit which might react upon the reputation of the man whom above all others I revere. ¹¹In some I was myself concerned and can speak as an eye-witness, while in others I was either not present or played so small a part that they could only be told as by a third person. ¹²The following narrative is drawn from my own experience.

¹³It was a wild morning in October, and I observed as I was dressing how the last remaining leaves were being whirled from the solitary plane tree which graces the yard behind our house. ¹⁴I descended to breakfast prepared to find my companion in depressed spirits, for, like all great artists, he was easily impressed by his surroundings. ¹⁵On the contrary, I found that he had nearly finished his meal, and that his mood was particularly bright and joyous, with that somewhat sinister cheerfulness which was characteristic of his lighter moments.

¹⁶"You have a case, Holmes?" I remarked.

¹⁷"The faculty of deduction is certainly contagious, Watson," he answered. ¹⁸"It has enabled you to probe my secret. ¹⁹Yes, I have a case. ²⁰After a month of trivialities and stagnation the wheels move once more."

²¹"Might I share it?"

²²"There is little to share, but we may discuss it when you have consumed the two hard-boiled eggs with which our new cook has favoured us. ²³Their condition may not be unconnected with the copy of the Family Herald which I observed yesterday upon the hall-table. ²⁴Even so trivial a matter as cooking an egg demands an attention which is conscious of the passage of time and incompatible with the love romance in that excellent periodical."

²⁵A quarter of an hour later the table had been cleared and we were face to face. ²⁶He had drawn a letter from his pocket.

²⁷"You have heard of Neil Gibson, the Gold King?" he said.

²⁸"You mean the American Senator?"

²⁹“Well, he was once Senator for some Western state, but is better known as the greatest gold-mining magnate in the world.”

³⁰“Yes, I know of him. ³¹He has surely lived in England for some time. ³²His name is very familiar.”

³³“Yes, he bought a considerable estate in Hampshire some five years ago. ³⁴Possibly you have already heard of the tragic end of his wife?”

³⁵“Of course. ³⁶I remember it now. ³⁷That is why the name is familiar. ³⁸But I really know nothing of the details.”

³⁹Holmes waved his hand towards some papers on a chair. ⁴⁰“I had no idea that the case was coming my way or I should have had my extracts ready,” said he. ⁴¹“The fact is that the problem, though exceedingly sensational, appeared to present no difficulty. ⁴²The interesting personality of the accused does not obscure the clearness of the evidence. ⁴³That was the view taken by the coroner's jury and also in the police-court proceedings. ⁴⁴It is now referred to the Assizes at Winchester. ⁴⁵I fear it is a thankless business. ⁴⁶I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them. ⁴⁷Unless some entirely new and unexpected ones come to light I do not see what my client can hope for.”

⁴⁸“Your client?”

⁴⁹“Ah, I forgot I had not told you. ⁵⁰I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backward. ⁵¹You had best read this first.”

⁵²The letter which he handed to me, written in a bold, masterful hand, ran as follows:

⁵³Claridge's Hotel

⁵⁴October 3rd.

⁵⁵Dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes:

⁵⁶I can't see the best woman God ever made go to her death without doing all that is possible to save her. ⁵⁷I can't explain things—I can't even try to explain them, but I know beyond all doubt that Miss Dunbar is innocent. ⁵⁸You know the facts—who doesn't? ⁵⁹It has been the gossip of the country. ⁶⁰And never a voice raised for her! ⁶¹It's the damned injustice of it all that makes me crazy. ⁶²That woman has a heart that wouldn't let her kill a fly. ⁶³Well, I'll come at eleven to-morrow and see if you can get some ray of light in the dark. ⁶⁴Maybe I have a clue and don't know it. ⁶⁵Anyhow, all I know and all I have and all I am are for your use if only you can save her. ⁶⁶If ever in your life you showed your powers, put them now into this case.

⁶⁷Yours faithfully,

⁶⁸J. Neil Gibson.

⁶⁹“There you have it,” said Sherlock Holmes, knocking out the ashes of his after-breakfast pipe and slowly refilling it. ⁷⁰“That is the gentleman I await. ⁷¹As to the story, you have hardly time to master all these papers, so I must give it to you in a nutshell if you are to take an intelligent interest in the proceedings. ⁷²This man is the greatest financial power in the world, and a man, as I understand, of most violent and formidable character. ⁷³He married a wife, the victim of this tragedy, of whom I know nothing save that she was past her prime, which was the more unfortunate as a very attractive governess superintended the education of two young children. ⁷⁴These are the three people concerned, and the scene is a grand old manor house, the centre of a historical English state. ⁷⁵Then as to the tragedy. ⁷⁶The wife was found in the grounds nearly half a mile from the house, late at night, clad in her dinner dress, with a shawl over her shoulders and a revolver bullet through her brain. ⁷⁷No weapon was found near her and there was no local clue as to the murder. ⁷⁸No weapon near her, Watson—mark that! ⁷⁹The

crime seems to have been committed late in the evening, and the body was found by a game-keeper about eleven o'clock, when it was examined by the police and by a doctor before being carried up to the house. ⁸⁰Is this too condensed, or can you follow it clearly?"

⁸¹"It is all very clear. ⁸²But why suspect the governess?"

⁸³"Well, in the first place there is some very direct evidence. ⁸⁴A revolver with one discharged chamber and a calibre which corresponded with the bullet was found on the floor of her wardrobe." ⁸⁵His eyes fixed and he repeated in broken words, "On—the—floor—of—her—wardrobe." ⁸⁶Then he sank into silence, and I saw that some train of thought had been set moving which I should be foolish to interrupt. ⁸⁷Suddenly with a start he emerged into brisk life once more. ⁸⁸"Yes, Watson, it was found. ⁸⁹Pretty damning, eh? ⁹⁰So the two juries thought. ⁹¹Then the dead woman had a note upon her making an appointment at that very place and signed by the governess. ⁹²How's that? ⁹³Finally there is the motive. ⁹⁴Senator Gibson is an attractive person. ⁹⁵If his wife dies, who more likely to succeed her than the young lady who had already by all accounts received pressing attentions from her employer? ⁹⁶Love, fortune, power, all depending upon one middle-aged life. ⁹⁷Ugly, Watson—very ugly!"

⁹⁸"Yes, indeed, Holmes."

⁹⁹"Nor could she prove an alibi. ¹⁰⁰On the contrary, she had to admit that she was down near Thor Bridge—that was the scene of the tragedy—about that hour. ¹⁰¹She couldn't deny it, for some passing villager had seen her there."

¹⁰²"That really seems final."

¹⁰³"And yet, Watson—and yet! ¹⁰⁴This bridge—a single broad span of stone with balustraded sides—carries the drive over the narrowest part of a long, deep, reed-girt sheet of water. ¹⁰⁵Thor Mere it is called. ¹⁰⁶In the mouth of the bridge lay the dead woman. ¹⁰⁷Such are the main facts. ¹⁰⁸But here, if I mistake not, is our client, considerably before his time."

¹⁰⁹Billy had opened the door, but the name which he announced was an unexpected one. ¹¹⁰Mr. Marlow Bates was a stranger to both of us. ¹¹¹He was a thin, nervous wisp of a man with frightened eyes and a twitching, hesitating manner—a man whom my own professional eye would judge to be on the brink of an absolute nervous breakdown.

¹¹²"You seem agitated, Mr. Bates," said Holmes. ¹¹³"Pray sit down. ¹¹⁴I fear I can only give you a short time, for I have an appointment at eleven."

¹¹⁵"I know you have," our visitor gasped, shooting out short sentences like a man who is out of breath. ¹¹⁶"Mr. Gibson is coming. ¹¹⁷Mr. Gibson is my employer. ¹¹⁸I am manager of his estate. ¹¹⁹Mr. Holmes, he is a villain—an infernal villain."

¹²⁰"Strong language, Mr. Bates."

¹²¹"I have to be emphatic, Mr. Holmes, for the time is so limited. ¹²²I would not have him find me here for the world. ¹²³He is almost due now. ¹²⁴But I was so situated that I could not come earlier. ¹²⁵His secretary, Mr. Ferguson, only told me this morning of his appointment with you."

¹²⁶"And you are his manager?"

¹²⁷"I have given him notice. ¹²⁸In a couple of weeks I shall have shaken off his accursed slavery. ¹²⁹A hard man, Mr. Holmes, hard to all about him. ¹³⁰Those public charities are a screen to cover his private iniquities. ¹³¹But his wife was his chief victim. ¹³²He was brutal to her—yes, sir, brutal! ¹³³How she came by her death I do not know, but I am sure that he had made her life a misery to her. ¹³⁴She was a creature of the tropics, a Brazilian by birth, as no doubt you know."

¹³⁵“No, it had escaped me.”

¹³⁶“Tropical by birth and tropical by nature. ¹³⁷A child of the sun and of passion. ¹³⁸She had loved him as such women can love, but when her own physical charms had faded—I am told that they once were great—there was nothing to hold him. ¹³⁹We all liked her and felt for her and hated him for the way that he treated her. ¹⁴⁰But he is plausible and cunning. ¹⁴¹That is all I have to say to you. ¹⁴²Don't take him at his face value. ¹⁴³There is more behind. ¹⁴⁴Now I'll go. ¹⁴⁵No, no, don't detain me! ¹⁴⁶He is almost due.”

¹⁴⁷With a frightened look at the clock our strange visitor literally ran to the door and disappeared.

¹⁴⁸“Well! ¹⁴⁹Well!” said Holmes after an interval of silence. ¹⁵⁰“Mr. Gibson seems to have a nice loyal household. ¹⁵¹But the warning is a useful one, and now we can only wait till the man himself appears.”

¹⁵²Sharp at the hour we heard a heavy step upon the stairs, and the famous millionaire was shown into the room. ¹⁵³As I looked upon him I understood not only the fears and dislike of his manager but also the execrations which so many business rivals have heaped upon his head. ¹⁵⁴If I were a sculptor and desired to idealize the successful man of affairs, iron of nerve and leathery of conscience, I should choose Mr. Neil Gibson as my model. ¹⁵⁵His tall, gaunt, craggy figure had a suggestion of hunger and rapacity. ¹⁵⁶An Abraham Lincoln keyed to base uses instead of high ones would give some idea of the man. ¹⁵⁷His face might have been chiselled in granite, hard-set, craggy, remorseless, with deep lines upon it, the scars of many a crisis. ¹⁵⁸Cold gray eyes, looking shrewdly out from under bristling brows, surveyed us each in turn. ¹⁵⁹He bowed in perfunctory fashion as Holmes mentioned my name, and then with a masterful air of possession he drew a chair up to my companion and seated himself with his bony knees almost touching him.

¹⁶⁰“Let me say right here, Mr. Holmes,” he began, “that money is nothing to me in this case. ¹⁶¹You can burn it if it's any use in lighting you to the truth. ¹⁶²This woman is innocent and this woman has to be cleared, and it's up to you to do it. ¹⁶³Name your figure!”

¹⁶⁴“My professional charges are upon a fixed scale,” said Holmes coldly. ¹⁶⁵“I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.”

¹⁶⁶“Well, if dollars make no difference to you, think of the reputation. ¹⁶⁷If you pull this off every paper in England and America will be booming you. ¹⁶⁸You'll be the talk of two continents.”

¹⁶⁹“Thank you, Mr. Gibson, I do not think that I am in need of booming. ¹⁷⁰It may surprise you to know that I prefer to work anonymously, and that it is the problem itself which attracts me. ¹⁷¹But we are wasting time. ¹⁷²Let us get down to the facts.”

¹⁷³“I think that you will find all the main ones in the press reports. ¹⁷⁴I don't know that I can add anything which will help you. ¹⁷⁵But if there is anything you would wish more light upon—well, I am here to give it.”

¹⁷⁶“Well, there is just one point.”

¹⁷⁷“What is it?”

¹⁷⁸“What were the exact relations between you and Miss Dunbar?”

¹⁷⁹The Gold King gave a violent start and half rose from his chair. ¹⁸⁰Then his massive calm came back to him.

¹⁸¹“I suppose you are within your rights—and maybe doing your duty—in asking such a question, Mr. Holmes.”

¹⁸²“We will agree to suppose so,” said Holmes.

¹⁸³“Then I can assure you that our relations were entirely and always those of an employer towards a young lady whom he never conversed with, or ever saw, save when she was in the company of his children.”

¹⁸⁴Holmes rose from his chair.

¹⁸⁵“I am a rather busy man, Mr. Gibson,” said he, “and I have no time or taste for aimless conversations.

¹⁸⁶I wish you good-morning.”

¹⁸⁷Our visitor had risen also, and his great loose figure towered above Holmes. ¹⁸⁸There was an angry gleam from under those bristling brows and a tinge of colour in the sallow cheeks.

¹⁸⁹“What the devil do you mean by this, Mr. Holmes? ¹⁹⁰Do you dismiss my case?”

¹⁹¹“Well, Mr. Gibson, at least I dismiss you. ¹⁹²I should have thought my words were plain.”

¹⁹³“Plain enough, but what's at the back of it? ¹⁹⁴Raising the price on me, or afraid to tackle it, or what?

¹⁹⁵I've a right to a plain answer.”

¹⁹⁶“Well, perhaps you have,” said Holmes. ¹⁹⁷“I'll give you one. ¹⁹⁸This case is quite sufficiently complicated to start with without the further difficulty of false information.”

¹⁹⁹“Meaning that I lie.”

²⁰⁰“Well, I was trying to express it as delicately as I could, but if you insist upon the word I will not contradict you.”

²⁰¹I sprang to my feet, for the expression upon the millionaire's face was fiendish in its intensity, and he had raised his great knotted fist. ²⁰²Holmes smiled languidly and reached his hand out for his pipe.

²⁰³“Don't be noisy, Mr. Gibson. ²⁰⁴I find that after breakfast even the smallest argument is unsettling.

²⁰⁵I suggest that a stroll in the morning air and a little quiet thought will be greatly to your advantage.”

²⁰⁶With an effort the Gold King mastered his fury. ²⁰⁷I could not but admire him, for by a supreme self-command he had turned in a minute from a hot flame of anger to a frigid and contemptuous indifference.

²⁰⁸“Well, it's your choice. ²⁰⁹I guess you know how to run your own business. ²¹⁰I can't make you touch the case against your will. ²¹¹You've done yourself no good this morning, Mr. Holmes, for I have broken stronger men than you. ²¹²No man ever crossed me and was the better for it.”

²¹³“So many have said so, and yet here I am,” said Holmes, smiling. ²¹⁴“Well, good-morning, Mr. Gibson. ²¹⁵You have a good deal yet to learn.”

²¹⁶Our visitor made a noisy exit, but Holmes smoked in imperturbable silence with dreamy eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

²¹⁷“Any views, Watson?” he asked at last.

²¹⁸“Well, Holmes, I must confess that when I consider that this is a man who would certainly brush any obstacle from his path, and when I remember that his wife may have been an obstacle and an object of dislike, as that man Bates plainly told us, it seems to me—”

²¹⁹“Exactly. ²²⁰And to me also.”

²²¹“But what were his relations with the governess, and how did you discover them?”

²²²“Bluff, Watson, bluff! ²²³When I considered the passionate, unconventional, unbusinesslike tone of his letter and contrasted it with his self-contained manner and appearance, it was pretty clear that there was some deep emotion which centred upon the accused woman rather than upon the victim. ²²⁴We've

got to understand the exact relations of those three people if we are to reach the truth. ²²⁵You saw the frontal attack which I made upon him, and how imperturbably he received it. ²²⁶Then I bluffed him by giving him the impression that I was absolutely certain, when in reality I was only extremely suspicious.”

²²⁷“Perhaps he will come back?”

²²⁸“He is sure to come back. ²²⁹He must come back. ²³⁰He can't leave it where it is. ²³¹Ha! isn't that a ring? ²³²Yes, there is his footstep. ²³³Well, Mr. Gibson, I was just saying to Dr. Watson that you were somewhat overdue.”

²³⁴The Gold King had reentered the room in a more chastened mood than he had left it. ²³⁵His wounded pride still showed in his resentful eyes, but his common sense had shown him that he must yield if he would attain his end.

²³⁶“I've been thinking it over, Mr. Holmes, and I feel that I have been hasty in taking your remarks amiss. ²³⁷You are justified in getting down to the facts, whatever they may be, and I think the more of you for it. ²³⁸I can assure you, however, that the relations between Miss Dunbar and me don't really touch this case.”

²³⁹“That is for me to decide, is it not?”

²⁴⁰“Yes, I guess that is so. ²⁴¹You're like a surgeon who wants every symptom before he can give his diagnosis.”

²⁴²“Exactly. ²⁴³That expresses it. ²⁴⁴And it is only a patient who has an object in deceiving his surgeon who would conceal the facts of his case.”

²⁴⁵“That may be so, but you will admit, Mr. Holmes, that most men would shy off a bit when they are asked point-blank what their relations with a woman may be—if there is really some serious feeling in the case. ²⁴⁶I guess most men have a little private reserve of their own in some corner of their souls where they don't welcome intruders. ²⁴⁷And you burst suddenly into it. ²⁴⁸But the object excuses you, since it was to try and save her. ²⁴⁹Well, the stakes are down and the reserve open, and you can explore where you will. ²⁵⁰What is it you want?”

²⁵¹“The truth.”

²⁵²The Gold King paused for a moment as one who marshals his thoughts. ²⁵³His grim, deep-lined face had become even sadder and more grave.

²⁵⁴“I can give it to you in a very few words, Mr. Holmes,” said he at last. ²⁵⁵“There are some things that are painful as well as difficult to say, so I won't go deeper than is needful. ²⁵⁶I met my wife when I was gold-hunting in Brazil. ²⁵⁷Maria Pinto was the daughter of a government official at Manaos, and she was very beautiful. ²⁵⁸I was young and ardent in those days, but even now, as I look back with colder blood and a more critical eye, I can see that she was rare and wonderful in her beauty. ²⁵⁹It was a deep rich nature, too, passionate, whole-hearted, tropical, ill-balanced, very different from the American women whom I had known. ²⁶⁰Well, to make a long story short, I loved her and I married her. ²⁶¹It was only when the romance had passed—and it lingered for years—that I realized that we had nothing—absolutely nothing—in common. ²⁶²My love faded. ²⁶³If hers had faded also it might have been easier. ²⁶⁴But you know the wonderful way of women! ²⁶⁵Do what I might, nothing could turn her from me. ²⁶⁶If I have been harsh to her, even brutal as some have said, it has been because I knew that if I could kill her love, or if it turned to hate, it would be easier for both of us. ²⁶⁷But nothing changed her. ²⁶⁸She adored me in those English woods as she had adored me twenty years ago on the banks of the Amazon. ²⁶⁹Do what I might, she was as devoted as ever.

²⁷⁰“Then came Miss Grace Dunbar. ²⁷¹She answered our advertisement and became governess to our two children. ²⁷²Perhaps you have seen her portrait in the papers. ²⁷³The whole world has proclaimed that she also is a very beautiful woman. ²⁷⁴Now, I make no pretence to be more moral than my neighbours, and I will admit to you that I could not live under the same roof with such a woman and in daily contact with her without feeling a passionate regard for her. ²⁷⁵Do you blame me, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁷⁶“I do not blame you for feeling it. ²⁷⁷I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection.”

²⁷⁸“Well, maybe so,” said the millionaire, though for a moment the reproof had brought the old angry gleam into his eyes. ²⁷⁹“I’m not pretending to be any better than I am. ²⁸⁰I guess all my life I’ve been a man that reached out his hand for what he wanted, and I never wanted anything more than the love and possession of that woman. ²⁸¹I told her so.”

²⁸²“Oh, you did, did you?”

²⁸³Holmes could look very formidable when he was moved.

²⁸⁴“I said to her that if I could marry her I would, but that it was out of my power. ²⁸⁵I said that money was no object and that all I could do to make her happy and comfortable would be done.”

²⁸⁶“Very generous, I am sure,” said Holmes with a sneer.

²⁸⁷“See here, Mr. Holmes. ²⁸⁸I came to you on a question of evidence, not on a question of morals. ²⁸⁹I’m not asking for your criticism.”

²⁹⁰“It is only for the young lady’s sake that I touch your case at all,” said Holmes sternly. ²⁹¹“I don’t know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. ²⁹²Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences.”

²⁹³To my surprise the Gold King took the reproof with equanimity.

²⁹⁴“That’s how I feel myself about it now. ²⁹⁵I thank God that my plans did not work out as I intended.

²⁹⁶She would have none of it, and she wanted to leave the house instantly.”

²⁹⁷“Why did she not?”

²⁹⁸“Well, in the first place, others were dependent upon her, and it was no light matter for her to let them all down by sacrificing her living. ²⁹⁹When I had sworn—as I did—that she should never be molested again, she consented to remain. ³⁰⁰But there was another reason. ³⁰¹She knew the influence she had over me, and that it was stronger than any other influence in the world. ³⁰²She wanted to use it for good.”

³⁰³“How?”

³⁰⁴“Well, she knew something of my affairs. ³⁰⁵They are large, Mr. Holmes—large beyond the belief of an ordinary man. ³⁰⁶I can make or break—and it is usually break. ³⁰⁷It wasn’t individuals only. ³⁰⁸It was communities, cities, even nations. ³⁰⁹Business is a hard game, and the weak go to the wall. ³¹⁰I played the game for all it was worth. ³¹¹I never squealed myself, and I never cared if the other fellow squealed. ³¹²But she saw it different. ³¹³I guess she was right. ³¹⁴She believed and said that a fortune for one man that was more than he needed should not be built on ten thousand ruined men who were left without the means of life. ³¹⁵That was how she saw it, and I guess she could see past the dollars to something that was more lasting. ³¹⁶She found that I listened to what she said, and she believed she was serving the world by influencing my actions. ³¹⁷So she stayed—and then this came along.”

³¹⁸“Can you throw any light upon that?”

³¹⁹The Gold King paused for a minute or more, his head sunk in his hands, lost in deep thought.

³²⁰“It's very black against her. ³²¹I can't deny that. ³²²And women lead an inward life and may do things beyond the judgment of a man. ³²³At first I was so rattled and taken aback that I was ready to think she had been led away in some extraordinary fashion that was clean against her usual nature. ³²⁴One explanation came into my head. ³²⁵I give it to you, Mr. Holmes, for what it is worth. ³²⁶There is no doubt that my wife was bitterly jealous. ³²⁷There is a soul-jealousy that can be as frantic as any body-jealousy, and though my wife had no cause—and I think she understood this—for the latter, she was aware that this English girl exerted an influence upon my mind and my acts that she herself never had. ³²⁸It was an influence for good, but that did not mend the matter. ³²⁹She was crazy with hatred, and the heat of the Amazon was always in her blood. ³³⁰She might have planned to murder Miss Dunbar—or we will say to threaten her with a gun and so frighten her into leaving us. ³³¹Then there might have been a scuffle and the gun gone off and shot the woman who held it.”

³³²“That possibility had already occurred to me,” said Holmes. ³³³“Indeed, it is the only obvious alternative to deliberate murder.”

³³⁴“But she utterly denies it.”

³³⁵“Well, that is not final—is it? ³³⁶One can understand that a woman placed in so awful a position might hurry home still in her bewilderment holding the revolver. ³³⁷She might even throw it down among her clothes, hardly knowing what she was doing, and when it was found she might try to lie her way out by a total denial, since all explanation was impossible. ³³⁸What is against such a supposition?”

³³⁹“Miss Dunbar herself.”

³⁴⁰“Well, perhaps.”

³⁴¹Holmes looked at his watch. ³⁴²“I have no doubt we can get the necessary permits this morning and reach Winchester by the evening train. ³⁴³When I have seen this young lady it is very possible that I may be of more use to you in the matter, though I cannot promise that my conclusions will necessarily be such as you desire.”

³⁴⁴There was some delay in the official pass, and instead of reaching Winchester that day we went down to Thor Place, the Hampshire estate of Mr. Neil Gibson. ³⁴⁵He did not accompany us himself, but we had the address of Sergeant Coventry, of the local police, who had first examined into the affair. ³⁴⁶He was a tall, thin, cadaverous man, with a secretive and mysterious manner which conveyed the idea that he knew or suspected a very great deal more than he dared say. ³⁴⁷He had a trick, too, of suddenly sinking his voice to a whisper as if he had come upon something of vital importance, though the information was usually commonplace enough. ³⁴⁸Behind these tricks of manner he soon showed himself to be a decent, honest fellow who was not too proud to admit that he was out of his depth and would welcome any help.

³⁴⁹“Anyhow, I'd rather have you than Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes,” said he. ³⁵⁰“If the Yard gets called into a case, then the local loses all credit for success and may be blamed for failure. ³⁵¹Now, you play straight, so I've heard.”

³⁵²“I need not appear in the matter at all,” said Holmes to the evident relief of our melancholy acquaintance. ³⁵³“If I can clear it up I don't ask to have my name mentioned.”

³⁵⁴“Well, it's very handsome of you, I am sure. ³⁵⁵And your friend, Dr. Watson, can be trusted, I know. ³⁵⁶Now, Mr. Holmes, as we walk down to the place there is one question I should like to ask you. ³⁵⁷I'd breathe it to no soul but you.” ³⁵⁸He looked round as though he hardly dare utter the words. ³⁵⁹“Don't you think there might be a case against Mr. Neil Gibson himself?”

³⁶⁰“I have been considering that.”

³⁶¹“You've not seen Miss Dunbar. ³⁶²She is a wonderful fine woman in every way. ³⁶³He may well have wished his wife out of the road. ³⁶⁴And these Americans are readier with pistols than our folk are. ³⁶⁵It was his pistol, you know.”

³⁶⁶“Was that clearly made out?”

³⁶⁷“Yes, sir. ³⁶⁸It was one of a pair that he had.”

³⁶⁹“One of a pair? ³⁷⁰Where is the other?”

³⁷¹“Well, the gentleman has a lot of firearms of one sort and another. ³⁷²We never quite matched that particular pistol—but the box was made for two.”

³⁷³“If it was one of a pair you should surely be able to match it.”

³⁷⁴“Well, we have them all laid out at the house if you would care to look them over.”

³⁷⁵“Later, perhaps. I think we will walk down together and have a look at the scene of the tragedy.”

³⁷⁶This conversation had taken place in the little front room of Sergeant Coventry's humble cottage which served as the local police-station. ³⁷⁷A walk of half a mile or so across a wind-swept heath, all gold and bronze with the fading ferns, brought us to a side-gate opening into the grounds of the Thor Place estate. ³⁷⁸A path led us through the pheasant preserves, and then from a clearing we saw the widespread, half-timbered house, half Tudor and half Georgian, upon the crest of the hill. ³⁷⁹Beside us there was a long, reedy pool, constricted in the centre where the main carriage drive passed over a stone bridge, but swelling into small lakes on either side. ³⁸⁰Our guide paused at the mouth of this bridge, and he pointed to the ground.

³⁸¹“That was where Mrs. Gibson's body lay. ³⁸²I marked it by that stone.”

³⁸³“I understand that you were there before it was moved?”

³⁸⁴“Yes, they sent for me at once.”

³⁸⁵“Who did?”

³⁸⁶“Mr. Gibson himself. ³⁸⁷The moment the alarm was given and he had rushed down with others from the house, he insisted that nothing should be moved until the police should arrive.”

³⁸⁸“That was sensible. ³⁸⁹I gathered from the newspaper report that the shot was fired from close quarters.”

³⁹⁰“Yes, sir, very close.”

³⁹¹“Near the right temple?”

³⁹²“Just behind it, sir.”

³⁹³“How did the body lie?”

³⁹⁴“On the back, sir. ³⁹⁵No trace of a struggle. ³⁹⁶No marks. ³⁹⁷No weapon. ³⁹⁸The short note from Miss Dunbar was clutched in her left hand.”

³⁹⁹“Clutched, you say?”

⁴⁰⁰“Yes, sir, we could hardly open the fingers.”

⁴⁰¹“That is of great importance. ⁴⁰²It excludes the idea that anyone could have placed the note there after death in order to furnish a false clue. ⁴⁰³Dear me! ⁴⁰⁴The note, as I remember, was quite short:

⁴⁰⁵“I will be at Thor Bridge at nine o'clock.

⁴⁰⁶— “G. Dunbar.

⁴⁰⁷“Was that not so?”

⁴⁰⁸“Yes, sir.”

⁴⁰⁹“Did Miss Dunbar admit writing it?”

⁴¹⁰“Yes, sir.”

⁴¹¹“What was her explanation?”

⁴¹²“Her defence was reserved for the Assizes. ⁴¹³She would say nothing.”

⁴¹⁴“The problem is certainly a very interesting one. ⁴¹⁵The point of the letter is very obscure, is it not?”

⁴¹⁶“Well, sir,” said the guide, “it seemed, if I may be so bold as to say so, the only really clear point in the whole case.”

⁴¹⁷Holmes shook his head.

⁴¹⁸“Granting that the letter is genuine and was really written, it was certainly received some time before—say one hour or two. ⁴¹⁹Why, then, was this lady still clasping it in her left hand? ⁴²⁰Why should she carry it so carefully? ⁴²¹She did not need to refer to it in the interview. ⁴²²Does it not seem remarkable?”

⁴²³“Well, sir, as you put it, perhaps it does.”

⁴²⁴“I think I should like to sit quietly for a few minutes and think it out.” ⁴²⁵He seated himself upon the stone ledge of the bridge, and I could see his quick gray eyes darting their questioning glances in every direction. ⁴²⁶Suddenly he sprang up again and ran across to the opposite parapet, whipped his lens from his pocket, and began to examine the stonework.

⁴²⁷“This is curious,” said he.

⁴²⁸“Yes, sir, we saw the chip on the ledge. ⁴²⁹I expect it's been done by some passer-by.”

⁴³⁰The stonework was gray, but at this one point it showed white for a space not larger than a sixpence.

⁴³¹When examined closely one could see that the surface was chipped as by a sharp blow.

⁴³²“It took some violence to do that,” said Holmes thoughtfully. ⁴³³With his cane he struck the ledge several times without leaving a mark. ⁴³⁴“Yes, it was a hard knock. ⁴³⁵In a curious place, too. ⁴³⁶It was not from above but from below, for you see that it is on the lower edge of the parapet.”

⁴³⁷“But it is at least fifteen feet from the body.”

⁴³⁸“Yes, it is fifteen feet from the body. ⁴³⁹It may have nothing to do with the matter, but it is a point worth noting. ⁴⁴⁰I do not think that we have anything more to learn here. ⁴⁴¹There were no footsteps, you say?”

⁴⁴²“The ground was iron hard, sir. ⁴⁴³There were no traces at all.”

⁴⁴⁴“Then we can go. ⁴⁴⁵We will go up to the house first and look over these weapons of which you speak.

⁴⁴⁶Then we shall get on to Winchester, for I should desire to see Miss Dunbar before we go farther.”

⁴⁴⁷Mr. Neil Gibson had not returned from town, but we saw in the house the neurotic Mr. Bates who had called upon us in the morning. ⁴⁴⁸He showed us with a sinister relish the formidable array of firearms of various shapes and sizes which his employer had accumulated in the course of an adventurous life.

⁴⁴⁹“Mr. Gibson has his enemies, as anyone would expect who knew him and his methods,” said he. ⁴⁵⁰“He sleeps with a loaded revolver in the drawer beside his bed. ⁴⁵¹He is a man of violence, sir, and there are times when all of us are afraid of him. ⁴⁵²I am sure that the poor lady who has passed was often terrified.”

⁴⁵³“Did you ever witness physical violence towards her?”

⁴⁵⁴“No, I cannot say that. ⁴⁵⁵But I have heard words which were nearly as bad—words of cold, cutting contempt, even before the servants.”

⁴⁵⁶“Our millionaire does not seem to shine in private life,” remarked Holmes as we made our way to the station. ⁴⁵⁷“Well, Watson, we have come on a good many facts, some of them new ones, and yet I seem some way from my conclusion. ⁴⁵⁸In spite of the very evident dislike which Mr. Bates has to his employer, I gather from him that when the alarm came he was undoubtedly in his library. ⁴⁵⁹Dinner was over at 8.30 and all was normal up to then. ⁴⁶⁰It is true that the alarm was somewhat late in the evening, but the tragedy certainly occurred about the hour named in the note. ⁴⁶¹There is no evidence at all that Mr. Gibson had been out of doors since his return from town at five o'clock. ⁴⁶²On the other hand, Miss Dunbar, as I understand it, admits that she had made an appointment to meet Mrs. Gibson at the bridge. ⁴⁶³Beyond this she would say nothing, as her lawyer had advised her to reserve her defence. ⁴⁶⁴We have several very vital questions to ask that young lady, and my mind will not be easy until we have seen her. ⁴⁶⁵I must confess that the case would seem to me to be very black against her if it were not for one thing.”

⁴⁶⁶“And what is that, Holmes?”

⁴⁶⁷“The finding of the pistol in her wardrobe.”

⁴⁶⁸“Dear me, Holmes!” I cried, “that seemed to me to be the most damning incident of all.”

⁴⁶⁹“Not so, Watson. ⁴⁷⁰It had struck me even at my first perfunctory reading as very strange, and now that I am in closer touch with the case it is my only firm ground for hope. ⁴⁷¹We must look for consistency. ⁴⁷²Where there is a want of it we must suspect deception.”

⁴⁷³“I hardly follow you.”

⁴⁷⁴“Well now, Watson, suppose for a moment that we visualize you in the character of a woman who, in a cold, premeditated fashion, is about to get rid of a rival. ⁴⁷⁵You have planned it. ⁴⁷⁶A note has been written. ⁴⁷⁷The victim has come. ⁴⁷⁸You have your weapon. ⁴⁷⁹The crime is done. ⁴⁸⁰It has been workmanlike and complete. ⁴⁸¹Do you tell me that after carrying out so crafty a crime you would now ruin your reputation as a criminal by forgetting to fling your weapon into those adjacent reed-beds which would forever cover it, but you must needs carry it carefully home and put it in your own wardrobe, the very first place that would be searched? ⁴⁸²Your best friends would hardly call you a schemer, Watson, and yet I could not picture you doing anything so crude as that.”

⁴⁸³“In the excitement of the moment—”

⁴⁸⁴“No, no, Watson, I will not admit that it is possible. ⁴⁸⁵Where a crime is coolly premeditated, then the means of covering it are coolly premeditated also. ⁴⁸⁶I hope, therefore, that we are in the presence of a serious misconception.”

⁴⁸⁷“But there is so much to explain.”

⁴⁸⁸“Well, we shall set about explaining it. ⁴⁸⁹When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so damning becomes a clue to the truth. ⁴⁹⁰For example, there is this revolver. ⁴⁹¹Miss Dunbar disclaims all knowledge of it. ⁴⁹²On our new theory she is speaking truth when she says so. ⁴⁹³Therefore, it was placed in her wardrobe. ⁴⁹⁴Who placed it there? ⁴⁹⁵Someone who wished to incriminate her.

⁴⁹⁶“Was not that person the actual criminal? ⁴⁹⁷You see how we come at once upon a most fruitful line of inquiry.”

⁴⁹⁸We were compelled to spend the night at Winchester, as the formalities had not yet been completed, but next morning, in the company of Mr. Joyce Cummings, the rising barrister who was entrusted with the defence, we were allowed to see the young lady in her cell. ⁴⁹⁹I had expected from all that we had heard to see a beautiful woman, but I can never forget the effect which Miss Dunbar produced upon me. ⁵⁰⁰It was no wonder that even the masterful millionaire had found in her something more powerful than himself—something which could control and guide him. ⁵⁰¹One felt, too, as one looked at the strong, clear-cut, and yet sensitive face, that even should she be capable of some impetuous deed, none the less there was an innate nobility of character which would make her influence always for the good. ⁵⁰²She was a brunette, tall, with a noble figure and commanding presence, but her dark eyes had in them the appealing, helpless expression of the hunted creature who feels the nets around it, but can see no way out from the toils. ⁵⁰³Now, as she realized the presence and the help of my famous friend, there came a touch of colour in her wan cheeks and a light of hope began to glimmer in the glance which she turned upon us.

⁵⁰⁴“Perhaps Mr. Neil Gibson has told you something of what occurred between us?” she asked in a low, agitated voice.

⁵⁰⁵“Yes,” Holmes answered, “you need not pain yourself by entering into that part of the story. ⁵⁰⁶After seeing you, I am prepared to accept Mr. Gibson's statement both as to the influence which you had over him and as to the innocence of your relations with him. ⁵⁰⁷But why was the whole situation not brought out in court?”

⁵⁰⁸“It seemed to me incredible that such a charge could be sustained. ⁵⁰⁹I thought that if we waited the whole thing must clear itself up without our being compelled to enter into painful details of the inner life of the family. ⁵¹⁰But I understand that far from clearing it has become even more serious.”

⁵¹¹“My dear young lady,” cried Holmes earnestly, “I beg you to have no illusions upon the point. ⁵¹²Mr. Cummings here would assure you that all the cards are at present against us, and that we must do everything that is possible if we are to win clear. ⁵¹³It would be a cruel deception to pretend that you are not in very great danger. ⁵¹⁴Give me all the help you can, then, to get at the truth.”

⁵¹⁵“I will conceal nothing.”

⁵¹⁶“Tell us, then, of your true relations with Mr. Gibson's wife.”

⁵¹⁷“She hated me, Mr. Holmes. ⁵¹⁸She hated me with all the fervour of her tropical nature. ⁵¹⁹She was a woman who would do nothing by halves, and the measure of her love for her husband was the measure also of her hatred for me. ⁵²⁰It is probable that she misunderstood our relations. ⁵²¹I would not wish to wrong her, but she loved so vividly in a physical sense that she could hardly understand the mental, and even spiritual, tie which held her husband to me, or imagine that it was only my desire to influence his power to good ends which kept me under his roof. ⁵²²I can see now that I was wrong. ⁵²³Nothing could justify me in remaining where I was a cause of unhappiness, and yet it is certain that the unhappiness would have remained even if I had left the house.”

⁵²⁴“Now, Miss Dunbar,” said Holmes, “I beg you to tell us exactly what occurred that evening.”

⁵²⁵“I can tell you the truth so far as I know it, Mr. Holmes, but I am in a position to prove nothing, and there are points—the most vital points—which I can neither explain nor can I imagine any explanation.”

⁵²⁶“If you will find the facts, perhaps others may find the explanation.”

⁵²⁷“With regard, then, to my presence at Thor Bridge that night, I received a note from Mrs. Gibson in the morning. ⁵²⁸It lay on the table of the schoolroom, and it may have been left there by her own hand.

⁵²⁹It implored me to see her there after dinner, said she had something important to say to me, and asked me to leave an answer on the sundial in the garden, as she desired no one to be in our confidence. ⁵³⁰I saw no reason for such secrecy, but I did as she asked, accepting the appointment. ⁵³¹She asked me to destroy her note and I burned it in the schoolroom grate. ⁵³²She was very much afraid of her husband, who treated her with a harshness for which I frequently reproached him, and I could only imagine that she acted in this way because she did not wish him to know of our interview.”

⁵³³“Yet she kept your reply very carefully?”

⁵³⁴“Yes. ⁵³⁵I was surprised to hear that she had it in her hand when she died.”

⁵³⁶“Well, what happened then?”

⁵³⁷“I went down as I had promised. ⁵³⁸When I reached the bridge she was waiting for me. ⁵³⁹Never did I realize till that moment how this poor creature hated me. ⁵⁴⁰She was like a mad woman—indeed, I think she was a mad woman, subtly mad with the deep power of deception which insane people may have. ⁵⁴¹How else could she have met me with unconcern every day and yet had so raging a hatred of me in her heart? ⁵⁴²I will not say what she said. ⁵⁴³She poured her whole wild fury out in burning and horrible words. ⁵⁴⁴I did not even answer—I could not. ⁵⁴⁵It was dreadful to see her. ⁵⁴⁶I put my hands to my ears and rushed away. ⁵⁴⁷When I left her she was standing, still shrieking out her curses at me, in the mouth of the bridge.”

⁵⁴⁸“Where she was afterwards found?”

⁵⁴⁹“Within a few yards from the spot.”

⁵⁵⁰“And yet, presuming that she met her death shortly after you left her, you heard no shot?”

⁵⁵¹“No, I heard nothing. ⁵⁵²But, indeed, Mr. Holmes, I was so agitated and horrified by this terrible outbreak that I rushed to get back to the peace of my own room, and I was incapable of noticing anything which happened.”

⁵⁵³“You say that you returned to your room. ⁵⁵⁴Did you leave it again before next morning?”

⁵⁵⁵“Yes, when the alarm came that the poor creature had met her death I ran out with the others.”

⁵⁵⁶“Did you see Mr. Gibson?”

⁵⁵⁷“Yes, he had just returned from the bridge when I saw him. ⁵⁵⁸He had sent for the doctor and the police.”

⁵⁵⁹“Did he seem to you much perturbed?”

⁵⁶⁰“Mr. Gibson is a very strong, self-contained man. ⁵⁶¹I do not think that he would ever show his emotions on the surface. ⁵⁶²But I, who knew him so well, could see that he was deeply concerned.”

⁵⁶³“Then we come to the all-important point. ⁵⁶⁴This pistol that was found in your room. ⁵⁶⁵Had you ever seen it before?”

⁵⁶⁶“Never, I swear it.”

⁵⁶⁷“When was it found?”

⁵⁶⁸“Next morning, when the police made their search.”

⁵⁶⁹“Among your clothes?”

⁵⁷⁰“Yes, on the floor of my wardrobe under my dresses.”

⁵⁷¹“You could not guess how long it had been there?”

⁵⁷²“It had not been there the morning before.”

⁵⁷³“How do you know?”

⁵⁷⁴“Because I tidied out the wardrobe.”

⁵⁷⁵“That is final. ⁵⁷⁶Then someone came into your room and placed the pistol there in order to inculcate you.”

⁵⁷⁷“It must have been so.”

⁵⁷⁸“And when?”

⁵⁷⁹“It could only have been at meal-time, or else at the hours when I would be in the schoolroom with the children.”

⁵⁸⁰“As you were when you got the note?”

⁵⁸¹“Yes, from that time onward for the whole morning.”

⁵⁸²“Thank you, Miss Dunbar. ⁵⁸³Is there any other point which could help me in the investigation?”

⁵⁸⁴“I can think of none.”

⁵⁸⁵“There was some sign of violence on the stonework of the bridge—a perfectly fresh chip just opposite the body. ⁵⁸⁶Could you suggest any possible explanation of that?”

⁵⁸⁷“Surely it must be a mere coincidence.”

⁵⁸⁸“Curious, Miss Dunbar, very curious. ⁵⁸⁹Why should it appear at the very time of the tragedy, and why at the very place?”

⁵⁹⁰“But what could have caused it? ⁵⁹¹Only great violence could have such an effect.”

⁵⁹²Holmes did not answer. ⁵⁹³His pale, eager face had suddenly assumed that tense, far-away expression which I had learned to associate with the supreme manifestations of his genius. ⁵⁹⁴So evident was the crisis in his mind that none of us dared to speak, and we sat, barrister, prisoner, and myself, watching him in a concentrated and absorbed silence. ⁵⁹⁵Suddenly he sprang from his chair, vibrating with nervous energy and the pressing need for action.

⁵⁹⁶“Come, Watson, come!” he cried.

⁵⁹⁷“What is it, Mr. Holmes?”

⁵⁹⁸“Never mind, my dear lady. ⁵⁹⁹You will hear from me, Mr. Cummings. ⁶⁰⁰With the help of the god of justice I will give you a case which will make England ring. ⁶⁰¹You will get news by to-morrow, Miss Dunbar, and meanwhile take my assurance that the clouds are lifting and that I have every hope that the light of truth is breaking through.”

⁶⁰²It was not a long journey from Winchester to Thor Place, but it was long to me in my impatience, while for Holmes it was evident that it seemed endless; for, in his nervous restlessness, he could not sit still, but paced the carriage or drummed with his long, sensitive fingers upon the cushions beside him. ⁶⁰³Suddenly, however, as we neared our destination he seated himself opposite to me—we had a first-class carriage to ourselves—and laying a hand upon each of my knees he looked into my eyes with the peculiarly mischievous gaze which was characteristic of his more imp-like moods.

⁶⁰⁴“Watson,” said he, “I have some recollection that you go armed upon these excursions of ours.”

⁶⁰⁵It was as well for him that I did so, for he took little care for his own safety when his mind was once absorbed by a problem, so that more than once my revolver had been a good friend in need. ⁶⁰⁶I reminded him of the fact.

⁶⁰⁷“Yes, yes, I am a little absent-minded in such matters. ⁶⁰⁸But have you your revolver on you?”

⁶⁰⁹I produced it from my hip-pocket, a short, handy, but very serviceable little weapon. ⁶¹⁰He undid the catch, shook out the cartridges, and examined it with care.

⁶¹¹“It's heavy—remarkably heavy,” said he.

⁶¹²“Yes, it is a solid bit of work.”

⁶¹³He mused over it for a minute.

⁶¹⁴“Do you know, Watson,” said he, “I believe your revolver is going to have a very intimate connection with the mystery which we are investigating.”

⁶¹⁵“My dear Holmes, you are joking.”

⁶¹⁶“No, Watson, I am very serious. ⁶¹⁷There is a test before us. ⁶¹⁸If the test comes off, all will be clear. ⁶¹⁹And the test will depend upon the conduct of this little weapon. ⁶²⁰One cartridge out. ⁶²¹Now we will replace the other five and put on the safety-catch. ⁶²²So! ⁶²³That increases the weight and makes it a better reproduction.”

⁶²⁴I had no glimmer of what was in his mind, nor did he enlighten me, but sat lost in thought until we pulled up in the little Hampshire station. ⁶²⁵We secured a ramshackle trap, and in a quarter of an hour were at the house of our confidential friend, the sergeant.

⁶²⁶“A clue, Mr. Holmes? ⁶²⁷What is it?”

⁶²⁸“It all depends upon the behaviour of Dr. Watson's revolver,” said my friend. ⁶²⁹“Here it is. ⁶³⁰Now, officer, can you give me ten yards of string?”

⁶³¹The village shop provided a ball of stout twine.

⁶³²“I think that this is all we will need,” said Holmes. ⁶³³“Now, if you please, we will get off on what I hope is the last stage of our journey.”

⁶³⁴The sun was setting and turning the rolling Hampshire moor into a wonderful autumnal panorama.

⁶³⁵The sergeant, with many critical and incredulous glances, which showed his deep doubts of the sanity of my companion, lurched along beside us. ⁶³⁶As we approached the scene of the crime I could see that my friend under all his habitual coolness was in truth deeply agitated.

⁶³⁷“Yes,” he said in answer to my remark, “you have seen me miss my mark before, Watson. ⁶³⁸I have an instinct for such things, and yet it has sometimes played me false. ⁶³⁹It seemed a certainty when first it flashed across my mind in the cell at Winchester, but one drawback of an active mind is that one can always conceive alternative explanations which would make our scent a false one. ⁶⁴⁰And yet—and yet— ⁶⁴¹Well, Watson, we can but try.”

⁶⁴²As he walked he had firmly tied one end of the string to the handle of the revolver. ⁶⁴³We had now reached the scene of the tragedy. ⁶⁴⁴With great care he marked out under the guidance of the policeman the exact spot where the body had been stretched. ⁶⁴⁵He then hunted among the heather and the ferns until he found a considerable stone. ⁶⁴⁶This he secured to the other end of his line of string, and he hung it over the parapet of the bridge so that it swung clear above the water. ⁶⁴⁷He then stood on the fatal spot, some distance from the edge of the bridge, with my revolver in his hand, the string being taut between the weapon and the heavy stone on the farther side.

⁶⁴⁸“Now for it!” he cried.

⁶⁴⁹At the words he raised the pistol to his head, and then let go his grip. ⁶⁵⁰In an instant it had been whisked away by the weight of the stone, had struck with a sharp crack against the parapet, and had vanished over the side into the water. ⁶⁵¹It had hardly gone before Holmes was kneeling beside the stonework, and a joyous cry showed that he had found what he expected.

⁶⁵²“Was there ever a more exact demonstration?” he cried. ⁶⁵³“See, Watson, your revolver has solved the problem!” ⁶⁵⁴As he spoke he pointed to a second chip of the exact size and shape of the first which had appeared on the under edge of the stone balustrade.

⁶⁵⁵“We'll stay at the inn to-night,” he continued as he rose and faced the astonished sergeant. ⁶⁵⁶“You will, of course, get a grappling-hook and you will easily restore my friend's revolver. ⁶⁵⁷You will also find beside it the revolver, string and weight with which this vindictive woman attempted to disguise her own crime and to fasten a charge of murder upon an innocent victim. ⁶⁵⁸You can let Mr. Gibson know that I will see him in the morning, when steps can be taken for Miss Dunbar's vindication.”

⁶⁵⁹Late that evening, as we sat together smoking our pipes in the village inn, Holmes gave me a brief review of what had passed.

⁶⁶⁰“I fear, Watson,” said he, “that you will not improve any reputation which I may have acquired by adding the case of the Thor Bridge mystery to your annals. ⁶⁶¹I have been sluggish in mind and wanting in that mixture of imagination and reality which is the basis of my art. ⁶⁶²I confess that the chip in the stonework was a sufficient clue to suggest the true solution, and that I blame myself for not having attained it sooner.

⁶⁶³“It must be admitted that the workings of this unhappy woman's mind were deep and subtle, so that it was no very simple matter to unravel her plot. ⁶⁶⁴I do not think that in our adventures we have ever come across a stranger example of what perverted love can bring about. ⁶⁶⁵Whether Miss Dunbar was her rival in a physical or in a merely mental sense seems to have been equally unforgivable in her eyes. ⁶⁶⁶No doubt she blamed this innocent lady for all those harsh dealings and unkind words with which her husband tried to repel her too demonstrative affection. ⁶⁶⁷Her first resolution was to end her own life. ⁶⁶⁸Her second was to do it in such a way as to involve her victim in a fate which was worse far than any sudden death could be.

⁶⁶⁹“We can follow the various steps quite clearly, and they show a remarkable subtlety of mind. ⁶⁷⁰A note was extracted very cleverly from Miss Dunbar which would make it appear that she had chosen the scene of the crime. ⁶⁷¹In her anxiety that it should be discovered she somewhat overdid it by holding it in her hand to the last. ⁶⁷²This alone should have excited my suspicions earlier than it did.

⁶⁷³“Then she took one of her husband's revolvers—there was, as you saw, an arsenal in the house—and kept it for her own use. ⁶⁷⁴A similar one she concealed that morning in Miss Dunbar's wardrobe after discharging one barrel, which she could easily do in the woods without attracting attention. ⁶⁷⁵She then went down to the bridge where she had contrived this exceedingly ingenious method for getting rid of her weapon. ⁶⁷⁶When Miss Dunbar appeared she used her last breath in pouring out her hatred, and then, when she was out of hearing, carried out her terrible purpose. ⁶⁷⁷Every link is now in its place and the chain is complete. ⁶⁷⁸The papers may ask why the mere was not dragged in the first instance, but it is easy to be wise after the event, and in any case the expanse of a reed-filled lake is no easy matter to drag unless you have a clear perception of what you are looking for and where. ⁶⁷⁹Well, Watson, we have helped a remarkable woman, and also a formidable man. ⁶⁸⁰Should they in the future join their forces, as seems not unlikely, the financial world may find that Mr. Neil Gibson has learned something in that schoolroom of sorrow where our earthly lessons are taught.”

The Adventure of the Creeping Man

¹Mr. Sherlock Holmes was always of opinion that I should publish the singular facts connected with Professor Presbury, if only to dispel once for all the ugly rumours which some twenty years ago agitated the university and were echoed in the learned societies of London. ²There were, however, certain obstacles in the way, and the true history of this curious case remained entombed in the tin box which contains so many records of my friend's adventures. ³Now we have at last obtained permission to ventilate the facts which formed one of the very last cases handled by Holmes before his retirement from practice. ⁴Even now a certain reticence and discretion have to be observed in laying the matter before the public.

⁵It was one Sunday evening early in September of the year 1903 that I received one of Holmes's laconic messages:

⁶Come at once if convenient—if inconvenient come all the same.

⁷— S. H.

⁸The relations between us in those latter days were peculiar. ⁹He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. ¹⁰As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index books, and others perhaps less excusable. ¹¹When it was a case of active work and a comrade was needed upon whose nerve he could place some reliance, my role was obvious. ¹²But apart from this I had uses. ¹³I was a whetstone for his mind. ¹⁴I stimulated him. ¹⁵He liked to think aloud in my presence. ¹⁶His remarks could hardly be said to be made to me—many of them would have been as appropriately addressed to his bedstead—but none the less, having formed the habit, it had become in some way helpful that I should register and interject. ¹⁷If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. ¹⁸Such was my humble role in our alliance.

¹⁹When I arrived at Baker Street I found him huddled up in his armchair with updrawn knees, his pipe in his mouth and his brow furrowed with thought. ²⁰It was clear that he was in the throes of some vexatious problem. ²¹With a wave of his hand he indicated my old armchair, but otherwise for half an hour he gave no sign that he was aware of my presence. ²²Then with a start he seemed to come from his reverie, and with his usual whimsical smile he greeted me back to what had once been my home.

²³“You will excuse a certain abstraction of mind, my dear Watson,” said he. ²⁴“Some curious facts have been submitted to me within the last twenty-four hours, and they in turn have given rise to some speculations of a more general character. ²⁵I have serious thoughts of writing a small monograph upon the uses of dogs in the work of the detective.”

²⁶“But surely, Holmes, this has been explored,” said I. ²⁷“Bloodhounds—sleuth-hounds—”

²⁸“No, no, Watson, that side of the matter is, of course, obvious. ²⁹But there is another which is far more subtle. ³⁰You may recollect that in the case which you, in your sensational way, coupled with the Copper Beeches, I was able, by watching the mind of the child, to form a deduction as to the criminal habits of the very smug and respectable father.”

³¹“Yes, I remember it well.”

³²“My line of thoughts about dogs is analogous. ³³A dog reflects the family life. ³⁴Whoever saw a frisky dog in a gloomy family, or a sad dog in a happy one? ³⁵Snarling people have snarling dogs, dangerous people have dangerous ones. ³⁶And their passing moods may reflect the passing moods of others.”

³⁷I shook my head. ³⁸“Surely, Holmes, this is a little far-fetched,” said I.

³⁹He had refilled his pipe and resumed his seat, taking no notice of my comment.

⁴⁰“The practical application of what I have said is very close to the problem which I am investigating.

⁴¹It is a tangled skein, you understand, and I am looking for a loose end. ⁴²One possible loose end lies in the question: ⁴³Why does Professor Presbury's wolfhound, Roy, endeavour to bite him?”

⁴⁴I sank back in my chair in some disappointment. ⁴⁵Was it for so trivial a question as this that I had been summoned from my work? ⁴⁶Holmes glanced across at me.

⁴⁷“The same old Watson!” said he. ⁴⁸“You never learn that the gravest issues may depend upon the smallest things. ⁴⁹But is it not on the face of it strange that a staid, elderly philosopher—you've heard of Presbury, of course, the famous Camford physiologist?—that such a man, whose friend has been his devoted wolfhound, should now have been twice attacked by his own dog? ⁵⁰What do you make of it?”

⁵¹“The dog is ill.”

⁵²“Well, that has to be considered. ⁵³But he attacks no one else, nor does he apparently molest his master, save on very special occasions. ⁵⁴Curious, Watson—very curious. ⁵⁵But young Mr. Bennett is before his time if that is his ring. ⁵⁶I had hoped to have a longer chat with you before he came.”

⁵⁷There was a quick step on the stairs, a sharp tap at the door, and a moment later the new client presented himself. ⁵⁸He was a tall, handsome youth about thirty, well dressed and elegant, but with something in his bearing which suggested the shyness of the student rather than the self-possession of the man of the world. ⁵⁹He shook hands with Holmes, and then looked with some surprise at me.

⁶⁰“This matter is very delicate, Mr. Holmes,” he said. ⁶¹“Consider the relation in which I stand to Professor Presbury both privately and publicly. ⁶²I really can hardly justify myself if I speak before any third person.”

⁶³“Have no fear, Mr. Bennett. ⁶⁴Dr. Watson is the very soul of discretion, and I can assure you that this is a matter in which I am very likely to need an assistant.”

⁶⁵“As you like, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁶You will, I am sure, understand my having some reserves in the matter.”

⁶⁷“You will appreciate it, Watson, when I tell you that this gentleman, Mr. Trevor Bennett, is professional assistant to the great scientist, lives under his roof, and is engaged to his only daughter. ⁶⁸Certainly we must agree that the professor has every claim upon his loyalty and devotion. ⁶⁹But it may best be shown by taking the necessary steps to clear up this strange mystery.”

⁷⁰“I hope so, Mr. Holmes. ⁷¹That is my one object. ⁷²Does Dr. Watson know the situation?”

⁷³“I have not had time to explain it.”

⁷⁴“Then perhaps I had better go over the ground again before explaining some fresh developments.”

⁷⁵“I will do so myself,” said Holmes, “in order to show that I have the events in their due order. ⁷⁶The professor, Watson, is a man of European reputation. ⁷⁷His life has been academic. ⁷⁸There has never been a breath of scandal. ⁷⁹He is a widower with one daughter, Edith. ⁸⁰He is, I gather, a man of very virile and positive, one might almost say combative, character. ⁸¹So the matter stood until a very few months ago.

⁸²“Then the current of his life was broken. ⁸³He is sixty-one years of age, but he became engaged to the daughter of Professor Morphy, his colleague in the chair of comparative anatomy. ⁸⁴It was not, as I understand, the reasoned courting of an elderly man but rather the passionate frenzy of youth, for no one could have shown himself a more devoted lover. ⁸⁵The lady, Alice Morphy, was a very perfect girl both in mind and body, so that there was every excuse for the professor's infatuation. ⁸⁶None the less, it did not meet with full approval in his own family.”

⁸⁷“We thought it rather excessive,” said our visitor.

⁸⁸“Exactly. ⁸⁹Excessive and a little violent and unnatural. ⁹⁰Professor Presbury was rich, however, and there was no objection upon the part of the father. ⁹¹The daughter, however, had other views, and there were already several candidates for her hand, who, if they were less eligible from a worldly point of view, were at least more of an age. ⁹²The girl seemed to like the professor in spite of his eccentricities. ⁹³It was only age which stood in the way.

⁹⁴“About this time a little mystery suddenly clouded the normal routine of the professor's life. ⁹⁵He did what he had never done before. ⁹⁶He left home and gave no indication where he was going. ⁹⁷He was away a fortnight and returned looking rather travel-worn. ⁹⁸He made no allusion to where he had been, although he was usually the frankest of men. ⁹⁹It chanced, however, that our client here, Mr. Bennett, received a letter from a fellow-student in Prague, who said that he was glad to have seen Professor Presbury there, although he had not been able to talk to him. ¹⁰⁰Only in this way did his own household learn where he had been.

¹⁰¹“Now comes the point. ¹⁰²From that time onward a curious change came over the professor. ¹⁰³He became furtive and sly. ¹⁰⁴Those around him had always the feeling that he was not the man that they had known, but that he was under some shadow which had darkened his higher qualities. ¹⁰⁵His intellect was not affected. ¹⁰⁶His lectures were as brilliant as ever. ¹⁰⁷But always there was something new, something sinister and unexpected. ¹⁰⁸His daughter, who was devoted to him, tried again and again to resume the old relations and to penetrate this mask which her father seemed to have put on. ¹⁰⁹You, sir, as I understand, did the same—but all was in vain. ¹¹⁰And now, Mr. Bennett, tell in your own words the incident of the letters.”

¹¹¹“You must understand, Dr. Watson, that the professor had no secrets from me. ¹¹²If I were his son or his younger brother I could not have more completely enjoyed his confidence. ¹¹³As his secretary I handled every paper which came to him, and I opened and subdivided his letters. ¹¹⁴Shortly after his return all this was changed. ¹¹⁵He told me that certain letters might come to him from London which would be marked by a cross under the stamp. ¹¹⁶These were to be set aside for his own eyes only. ¹¹⁷I may say that several of these did pass through my hands, that they had the E. C. mark, and were in an illiterate handwriting. ¹¹⁸If he answered them at all the answers did not pass through my hands nor into the letter-basket in which our correspondence was collected.”

¹¹⁹“And the box,” said Holmes.

¹²⁰“Ah, yes, the box. ¹²¹The professor brought back a little wooden box from his travels. ¹²²It was the one thing which suggested a Continental tour, for it was one of those quaint carved things which one associates with Germany. ¹²³This he placed in his instrument cupboard. ¹²⁴One day, in looking for a canula, I took up the box. ¹²⁵To my surprise he was very angry, and reproved me in words which were quite savage for my curiosity. ¹²⁶It was the first time such a thing had happened, and I was deeply hurt. ¹²⁷I endeavoured to explain that it was a mere accident that I had touched the box, but all the evening I was conscious that he looked at me harshly and that the incident was rankling in his mind.” ¹²⁸Mr. Bennett drew a little diary book from his pocket. ¹²⁹“That was on July 2d,” said he.

¹³⁰“You are certainly an admirable witness,” said Holmes. ¹³¹“I may need some of these dates which you have noted.”

¹³²“I learned method among other things from my great teacher. ¹³³From the time that I observed abnormality in his behaviour I felt that it was my duty to study his case. ¹³⁴Thus I have it here that it was on that very day, July 2d, that Roy attacked the professor as he came from his study into the hall. ¹³⁵Again, on July 11th, there was a scene of the same sort, and then I have a note of yet another upon July 20th. ¹³⁶After that we had to banish Roy to the stables. ¹³⁷He was a dear, affectionate animal—but I fear I weary you.”

¹³⁸Mr. Bennett spoke in a tone of reproach, for it was very clear that Holmes was not listening. ¹³⁹His face was rigid and his eyes gazed abstractedly at the ceiling. ¹⁴⁰With an effort he recovered himself.

¹⁴¹“Singular! ¹⁴²Most singular!” he murmured. ¹⁴³“These details were new to me, Mr. Bennett. ¹⁴⁴I think we have now fairly gone over the old ground, have we not? ¹⁴⁵But you spoke of some fresh developments.”

¹⁴⁶The pleasant, open face of our visitor clouded over, shadowed by some grim remembrance. ¹⁴⁷“What I speak of occurred the night before last,” said he. ¹⁴⁸“I was lying awake about two in the morning, when I was aware of a dull muffled sound coming from the passage. ¹⁴⁹I opened my door and peeped out. ¹⁵⁰I should explain that the professor sleeps at the end of the passage—”

¹⁵¹“The date being—?” asked Holmes.

¹⁵²Our visitor was clearly annoyed at so irrelevant an interruption.

¹⁵³“I have said, sir, that it was the night before last—that is, September 4th.”

¹⁵⁴Holmes nodded and smiled.

¹⁵⁵“Pray continue,” said he.

¹⁵⁶“He sleeps at the end of the passage and would have to pass my door in order to reach the staircase. ¹⁵⁷It was a really terrifying experience, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁵⁸I think that I am as strong-nerved as my neighbours, but I was shaken by what I saw. ¹⁵⁹The passage was dark save that one window halfway along it threw a patch of light. ¹⁶⁰I could see that something was coming along the passage, something dark and crouching. ¹⁶¹Then suddenly it emerged into the light, and I saw that it was he. ¹⁶²He was crawling, Mr. Holmes—crawling! ¹⁶³He was not quite on his hands and knees. ¹⁶⁴I should rather say on his hands and feet, with his face sunk between his hands. ¹⁶⁵Yet he seemed to move with ease. ¹⁶⁶I was so paralyzed by the sight that it was not until he had reached my door that I was able to step forward and ask if I could assist him. ¹⁶⁷His answer was extraordinary. ¹⁶⁸He sprang up, spat out some atrocious word at me, and hurried on past me, and down the staircase. ¹⁶⁹I waited about for an hour, but he did not come back. ¹⁷⁰It must have been daylight before he regained his room.”

¹⁷¹“Well, Watson, what make you of that?” asked Holmes with the air of the pathologist who presents a rare specimen.

¹⁷²“Lumbago, possibly. ¹⁷³I have known a severe attack make a man walk in just such a way, and nothing would be more trying to the temper.”

¹⁷⁴“Good, Watson! ¹⁷⁵You always keep us flat-footed on the ground. ¹⁷⁶But we can hardly accept lumbago, since he was able to stand erect in a moment.”

¹⁷⁷“He was never better in health,” said Bennett. ¹⁷⁸“In fact, he is stronger than I have known him for years. ¹⁷⁹But there are the facts, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁸⁰It is not a case in which we can consult the police, and yet we are utterly at our wit's end as to what to do, and we feel in some strange way that we are drifting towards disaster. ¹⁸¹Edith—Miss Presbury—feels as I do, that we cannot wait passively any longer.”

¹⁸²“It is certainly a very curious and suggestive case. ¹⁸³What do you think, Watson?”

¹⁸⁴“Speaking as a medical man,” said I, “it appears to be a case for an alienist. ¹⁸⁵The old gentleman's cerebral processes were disturbed by the love affair. ¹⁸⁶He made a journey abroad in the hope of breaking himself of the passion. ¹⁸⁷His letters and the box may be connected with some other private transaction—a loan, perhaps, or share certificates, which are in the box.”

¹⁸⁸“And the wolfhound no doubt disapproved of the financial bargain. ¹⁸⁹No, no, Watson, there is more in it than this. ¹⁹⁰Now, I can only suggest—”

¹⁹¹What Sherlock Holmes was about to suggest will never be known, for at this moment the door opened and a young lady was shown into the room. ¹⁹²As she appeared Mr. Bennett sprang up with a cry and ran forward with his hands out to meet those which she had herself outstretched.

¹⁹³“Edith, dear! ¹⁹⁴Nothing the matter, I hope?”

¹⁹⁵“I felt I must follow you. ¹⁹⁶Oh, Jack, I have been so dreadfully frightened! ¹⁹⁷It is awful to be there alone.”

¹⁹⁸“Mr. Holmes, this is the young lady I spoke of. ¹⁹⁹This is my fiancée.”

²⁰⁰“We were gradually coming to that conclusion, were we not, Watson?” Holmes answered with a smile. ²⁰¹“I take it, Miss Presbury, that there is some fresh development in the case, and that you thought we should know?”

²⁰²Our new visitor, a bright, handsome girl of a conventional English type, smiled back at Holmes as she seated herself beside Mr. Bennett.

²⁰³“When I found Mr. Bennett had left his hotel I thought I should probably find him here. ²⁰⁴Of course, he had told me that he would consult you. ²⁰⁵But, oh, Mr. Holmes, can you do nothing for my poor father?”

²⁰⁶“I have hopes, Miss Presbury, but the case is still obscure. ²⁰⁷Perhaps what you have to say may throw some fresh light upon it.”

²⁰⁸“It was last night, Mr. Holmes. ²⁰⁹He had been very strange all day. ²¹⁰I am sure that there are times when he has no recollection of what he does. ²¹¹He lives as in a strange dream. ²¹²Yesterday was such a day. ²¹³It was not my father with whom I lived. ²¹⁴His outward shell was there, but it was not really he.”

²¹⁵“Tell me what happened.”

²¹⁶“I was awakened in the night by the dog barking most furiously. ²¹⁷Poor Roy, he is chained now near the stable. ²¹⁸I may say that I always sleep with my door locked; for, as Jack—as Mr. Bennett—will tell you, we all have a feeling of impending danger. ²¹⁹My room is on the second floor. ²²⁰It happened that the blind was up in my window, and there was bright moonlight outside. ²²¹As I lay with my eyes fixed upon the square of light, listening to the frenzied barkings of the dog, I was amazed to see my father's face looking in at me. ²²²Mr. Holmes, I nearly died of surprise and horror. ²²³There it was pressed against the window-pane, and one hand seemed to be raised as if to push up the window. ²²⁴If that window had opened, I think I should have gone mad. ²²⁵It was no delusion, Mr. Holmes. ²²⁶Don't deceive yourself by thinking so. ²²⁷I dare say it was twenty seconds or so that I lay paralyzed and watched the face. ²²⁸Then it vanished, but I could not—I could not spring out of bed and look out after it. ²²⁹I lay cold and shivering till morning. ²³⁰At breakfast he was sharp and fierce in manner, and made no allusion to the adventure of the night. ²³¹Neither did I, but I gave an excuse for coming to town—and here I am.”

²³²Holmes looked thoroughly surprised at Miss Presbury's narrative.

²³³“My dear young lady, you say that your room is on the second floor. ²³⁴Is there a long ladder in the garden?”

²³⁵“No, Mr. Holmes, that is the amazing part of it. ²³⁶There is no possible way of reaching the window—and yet he was there.”

²³⁷“The date being September 5th,” said Holmes. ²³⁸“That certainly complicates matters.”

²³⁹It was the young lady's turn to look surprised. ²⁴⁰“This is the second time that you have alluded to the date, Mr. Holmes,” said Bennett. ²⁴¹“Is it possible that it has any bearing upon the case?”

²⁴²“It is possible—very possible—and yet I have not my full material at present.”

²⁴³“Possibly you are thinking of the connection between insanity and phases of the moon?”

²⁴⁴“No, I assure you. ²⁴⁵It was quite a different line of thought. ²⁴⁶Possibly you can leave your notebook with me, and I will check the dates. ²⁴⁷Now I think, Watson, that our line of action is perfectly clear. ²⁴⁸This young lady has informed us—and I have the greatest confidence in her intuition—that her father remembers little or nothing which occurs upon certain dates. ²⁴⁹We will therefore call upon him as if he had given us an appointment upon such a date. ²⁵⁰He will put it down to his own lack of memory. ²⁵¹Thus we will open our campaign by having a good close view of him.”

²⁵²“That is excellent,” said Mr. Bennett. ²⁵³“I warn you, however, that the professor is irascible and violent at times.”

²⁵⁴Holmes smiled. ²⁵⁵“There are reasons why we should come at once—very cogent reasons if my theories hold good. ²⁵⁶To-morrow, Mr. Bennett, will certainly see us in Camford. ²⁵⁷There is, if I remember right, an inn called the Chequers where the port used to be above mediocrity and the linen was above reproach. ²⁵⁸I think, Watson, that our lot for the next few days might lie in less pleasant places.”

²⁵⁹Monday morning found us on our way to the famous university town—an easy effort on the part of Holmes, who had no roots to pull up, but one which involved frantic planning and hurrying on my part, as my practice was by this time not inconsiderable. ²⁶⁰Holmes made no allusion to the case until after we had deposited our suitcases at the ancient hostel of which he had spoken.

²⁶¹“I think, Watson, that we can catch the professor just before lunch. ²⁶²He lectures at eleven and should have an interval at home.”

²⁶³“What possible excuse have we for calling?”

²⁶⁴Holmes glanced at his notebook.

²⁶⁵“There was a period of excitement upon August 26th. ²⁶⁶We will assume that he is a little hazy as to what he does at such times. ²⁶⁷If we insist that we are there by appointment I think he will hardly venture to contradict us. ²⁶⁸Have you the effrontery necessary to put it through?”

²⁶⁹“We can but try.”

²⁷⁰“Excellent, Watson! ²⁷¹Compound of the Busy Bee and Excelsior. ²⁷²We can but try—the motto of the firm. ²⁷³A friendly native will surely guide us.”

²⁷⁴Such a one on the back of a smart hansom swept us past a row of ancient colleges and, finally turning into a tree-lined drive, pulled up at the door of a charming house, girt round with lawns and covered with purple wisteria. ²⁷⁵Professor Presbury was certainly surrounded with every sign not only of comfort but of luxury. ²⁷⁶Even as we pulled up, a grizzled head appeared at the front window, and we were aware of a pair of keen eyes from under shaggy brows which surveyed us through large horn glasses. ²⁷⁷A moment later we were actually in his sanctum, and the mysterious scientist, whose vagaries had brought us from London, was standing before us. ²⁷⁸There was certainly no sign of eccentricity either in his manner or appearance, for he was a portly, large-featured man, grave, tall, and frock-coated, with the dignity of bearing which a lecturer needs. ²⁷⁹His eyes were his most remarkable feature, keen, observant, and clever to the verge of cunning.

²⁸⁰He looked at our cards. ²⁸¹“Pray sit down, gentlemen. ²⁸²What can I do for you?”

²⁸³Mr. Holmes smiled amiably.

²⁸⁴“It was the question which I was about to put to you, Professor.”

²⁸⁵“To me, sir!”

²⁸⁶“Possibly there is some mistake. ²⁸⁷I heard through a second person that Professor Presbury of Camford had need of my services.”

²⁸⁸“Oh, indeed!” ²⁸⁹It seemed to me that there was a malicious sparkle in the intense gray eyes. ²⁹⁰“You heard that, did you? ²⁹¹May I ask the name of your informant?”

²⁹²“I am sorry, Professor, but the matter was rather confidential. ²⁹³If I have made a mistake there is no harm done. ²⁹⁴I can only express my regret.”

²⁹⁵“Not at all. ²⁹⁶I should wish to go further into this matter. ²⁹⁷It interests me. ²⁹⁸Have you any scrap of writing, any letter or telegram, to bear out your assertion?”

²⁹⁹“No, I have not.”

³⁰⁰“I presume that you do not go so far as to assert that I summoned you?”

³⁰¹“I would rather answer no questions,” said Holmes.

³⁰²“No, I dare say not,” said the professor with asperity. ³⁰³“However, that particular one can be answered very easily without your aid.”

³⁰⁴He walked across the room to the bell. ³⁰⁵Our London friend, Mr. Bennett, answered the call.

³⁰⁶“Come in, Mr. Bennett. ³⁰⁷These two gentlemen have come from London under the impression that they have been summoned. ³⁰⁸You handle all my correspondence. ³⁰⁹Have you a note of anything going to a person named Holmes?”

³¹⁰“No, sir,” Bennett answered with a flush.

³¹¹“That is conclusive,” said the professor, glaring angrily at my companion. ³¹²“Now, sir”—he leaned forward with his two hands upon the table—“it seems to me that your position is a very questionable one.”

³¹³Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

³¹⁴“I can only repeat that I am sorry that we have made a needless intrusion.”

³¹⁵“Hardly enough, Mr. Holmes!” the old man cried in a high screaming voice, with extraordinary malignancy upon his face. ³¹⁶He got between us and the door as he spoke, and he shook his two hands at us with furious passion. ³¹⁷“You can hardly get out of it so easily as that.” ³¹⁸His face was convulsed, and he grinned and gibbered at us in his senseless rage. ³¹⁹I am convinced that we should have had to fight our way out of the room if Mr. Bennett had not intervened.

³²⁰“My dear Professor,” he cried, “consider your position! ³²¹Consider the scandal at the university! ³²²Mr. Holmes is a well-known man. ³²³You cannot possibly treat him with such discourtesy.”

³²⁴Sulkily our host—if I may call him so—cleared the path to the door. ³²⁵We were glad to find ourselves outside the house and in the quiet of the tree-lined drive. ³²⁶Holmes seemed greatly amused by the episode.

³²⁷“Our learned friend's nerves are somewhat out of order,” said he. ³²⁸“Perhaps our intrusion was a little crude, and yet we have gained that personal contact which I desired. ³²⁹But, dear me, Watson, he is surely at our heels. ³³⁰The villain still pursues us.”

³³¹There were the sounds of running feet behind, but it was, to my relief, not the formidable professor but his assistant who appeared round the curve of the drive. ³³²He came panting up to us.

³³³“I am so sorry, Mr. Holmes. ³³⁴I wished to apologize.”

³³⁵“My dear sir, there is no need. ³³⁶It is all in the way of professional experience.”

³³⁷“I have never seen him in a more dangerous mood. ³³⁸But he grows more sinister. ³³⁹You can understand now why his daughter and I are alarmed. ³⁴⁰And yet his mind is perfectly clear.”

³⁴¹“Too clear!” said Holmes. ³⁴²“That was my miscalculation. ³⁴³It is evident that his memory is much more reliable than I had thought. ³⁴⁴By the way, can we, before we go, see the window of Miss Presbury's room?”

³⁴⁵Mr. Bennett pushed his way through some shrubs, and we had a view of the side of the house.

³⁴⁶“It is there. ³⁴⁷The second on the left.”

³⁴⁸“Dear me, it seems hardly accessible. ³⁴⁹And yet you will observe that there is a creeper below and a water-pipe above which give some foothold.”

³⁵⁰“I could not climb it myself,” said Mr. Bennett.

³⁵¹“Very likely. ³⁵²It would certainly be a dangerous exploit for any normal man.”

³⁵³“There was one other thing I wish to tell you, Mr. Holmes. ³⁵⁴I have the address of the man in London to whom the professor writes. ³⁵⁵He seems to have written this morning, and I got it from his blotting-paper. ³⁵⁶It is an ignoble position for a trusted secretary, but what else can I do?”

³⁵⁷Holmes glanced at the paper and put it into his pocket.

³⁵⁸“Dorak—a curious name. ³⁵⁹Slavonic, I imagine. ³⁶⁰Well, it is an important link in the chain. ³⁶¹We return to London this afternoon, Mr. Bennett. ³⁶²I see no good purpose to be served by our remaining. ³⁶³We cannot arrest the professor because he has done no crime, nor can we place him under constraint, for he cannot be proved to be mad. ³⁶⁴No action is as yet possible.”

³⁶⁵“Then what on earth are we to do?”

³⁶⁶“A little patience, Mr. Bennett. ³⁶⁷Things will soon develop. ³⁶⁸Unless I am mistaken, next Tuesday may mark a crisis. ³⁶⁹Certainly we shall be in Camford on that day. ³⁷⁰Meanwhile, the general position is undeniably unpleasant, and if Miss Presbury can prolong her visit—”

³⁷¹“That is easy.”

³⁷²“Then let her stay till we can assure her that all danger is past. ³⁷³Meanwhile, let him have his way and do not cross him. ³⁷⁴So long as he is in a good humour all is well.”

³⁷⁵“There he is!” said Bennett in a startled whisper. ³⁷⁶Looking between the branches we saw the tall, erect figure emerge from the hall door and look around him. ³⁷⁷He stood leaning forward, his hands swinging straight before him, his head turning from side to side. ³⁷⁸The secretary with a last wave slipped off among the trees, and we saw him presently rejoin his employer, the two entering the house together in what seemed to be animated and even excited conversation.

³⁷⁹“I expect the old gentleman has been putting two and two together,” said Holmes as we walked hotelward. ³⁸⁰“He struck me as having a particularly clear and logical brain from the little I saw of him. ³⁸¹Explosive, no doubt, but then from his point of view he has something to explode about if detectives are put on his track and he suspects his own household of doing it. ³⁸²I rather fancy that friend Bennett is in for an uncomfortable time.”

³⁸³Holmes stopped at a post-office and sent off a telegram on our way. ³⁸⁴The answer reached us in the evening, and he tossed it across to me.

³⁸⁵Have visited the Commercial Road and seen Dorak. ³⁸⁶Suave person, Bohemian, elderly. ³⁸⁷Keeps large general store.

³⁸⁸— Mercer.

³⁸⁹“Mercer is since your time,” said Holmes. ³⁹⁰“He is my general utility man who looks up routine business. ³⁹¹It was important to know something of the man with whom our professor was so secretly corresponding. ³⁹²His nationality connects up with the Prague visit.”

³⁹³“Thank goodness that something connects with something,” said I. ³⁹⁴“At present we seem to be faced by a long series of inexplicable incidents with no bearing upon each other. ³⁹⁵For example, what possible connection can there be between an angry wolfhound and a visit to Bohemia, or either of them with a man crawling down a passage at night? ³⁹⁶As to your dates, that is the biggest mystification of all.”

³⁹⁷Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands. ³⁹⁸We were, I may say, seated in the old sitting-room of the ancient hotel, with a bottle of the famous vintage of which Holmes had spoken on the table between us.

³⁹⁹“Well, now, let us take the dates first,” said he, his finger-tips together and his manner as if he were addressing a class. ⁴⁰⁰“This excellent young man's diary shows that there was trouble upon July 2d, and from then onward it seems to have been at nine-day intervals, with, so far as I remember, only one exception. ⁴⁰¹Thus the last outbreak upon Friday was on September 3d, which also falls into the series, as did August 26th, which preceded it. ⁴⁰²The thing is beyond coincidence.”

⁴⁰³I was forced to agree.

⁴⁰⁴“Let us, then, form the provisional theory that every nine days the professor takes some strong drug which has a passing but highly poisonous effect. ⁴⁰⁵His naturally violent nature is intensified by it. ⁴⁰⁶He learned to take this drug while he was in Prague, and is now supplied with it by a Bohemian intermediary in London. ⁴⁰⁷This all hangs together, Watson!”

⁴⁰⁸“But the dog, the face at the window, the creeping man in the passage?”

⁴⁰⁹“Well, well, we have made a beginning. ⁴¹⁰I should not expect any fresh developments until next Tuesday. ⁴¹¹In the meantime we can only keep in touch with friend Bennett and enjoy the amenities of this charming town.”

⁴¹²In the morning Mr. Bennett slipped round to bring us the latest report. ⁴¹³As Holmes had imagined, times had not been easy with him. ⁴¹⁴Without exactly accusing him of being responsible for our presence, the professor had been very rough and rude in his speech, and evidently felt some strong grievance. ⁴¹⁵This morning he was quite himself again, however, and had delivered his usual brilliant lecture to a crowded class. ⁴¹⁶“Apart from his queer fits,” said Bennett, “he has actually more energy and vitality than I can ever remember, nor was his brain ever clearer. ⁴¹⁷But it's not he—it's never the man whom we have known.”

⁴¹⁸“I don't think you have anything to fear now for a week at least,” Holmes answered. ⁴¹⁹“I am a busy man, and Dr. Watson has his patients to attend to. ⁴²⁰Let us agree that we meet here at this hour next Tuesday, and I shall be surprised if before we leave you again we are not able to explain, even if we cannot perhaps put an end to, your troubles. ⁴²¹Meanwhile, keep us posted in what occurs.”

⁴²²I saw nothing of my friend for the next few days, but on the following Monday evening I had a short note asking me to meet him next day at the train. ⁴²³From what he told me as we travelled up to Camford all was well, the peace of the professor's house had been unruffled, and his own conduct perfectly normal. ⁴²⁴This also was the report which was given us by Mr. Bennett himself when he called upon us that evening at our old quarters in the Chequers. ⁴²⁵“He heard from his London correspondent to-day. ⁴²⁶There was a letter and there was a small packet, each with the cross under the stamp which warned me not to touch them. ⁴²⁷There has been nothing else.”

⁴²⁸“That may prove quite enough,” said Holmes grimly. ⁴²⁹“Now, Mr. Bennett, we shall, I think, come to some conclusion to-night. ⁴³⁰If my deductions are correct we should have an opportunity of bringing matters to a head. ⁴³¹In order to do so it is necessary to hold the professor under observation. ⁴³²I would suggest, therefore, that you remain awake and on the lookout. ⁴³³Should you hear him pass your door, do not interrupt him, but follow him as discreetly as you can. ⁴³⁴Dr. Watson and I will not be far off. ⁴³⁵By the way, where is the key of that little box of which you spoke?”

⁴³⁶“Upon his watch-chain.”

⁴³⁷“I fancy our researches must lie in that direction. ⁴³⁸At the worst the lock should not be very formidable. ⁴³⁹Have you any other able-bodied man on the premises?”

⁴⁴⁰“There is the coachman, Macphail.”

⁴⁴¹“Where does he sleep?”

⁴⁴²“Over the stables.”

⁴⁴³“We might possibly want him. ⁴⁴⁴Well, we can do no more until we see how things develop. ⁴⁴⁵Good-bye—but I expect that we shall see you before morning.”

⁴⁴⁶It was nearly midnight before we took our station among some bushes immediately opposite the hall door of the professor. ⁴⁴⁷It was a fine night, but chilly, and we were glad of our warm overcoats. ⁴⁴⁸There was a breeze, and clouds were scudding across the sky, obscuring from time to time the half-moon. ⁴⁴⁹It would have been a dismal vigil were it not for the expectation and excitement which carried us along, and the assurance of my comrade that we had probably reached the end of the strange sequence of events which had engaged our attention.

⁴⁵⁰“If the cycle of nine days holds good then we shall have the professor at his worst to-night,” said Holmes. ⁴⁵¹“The fact that these strange symptoms began after his visit to Prague, that he is in secret correspondence with a Bohemian dealer in London, who presumably represents someone in Prague, and that he received a packet from him this very day, all point in one direction. ⁴⁵²What he takes and why he takes it are still beyond our ken, but that it emanates in some way from Prague is clear enough. ⁴⁵³He takes it under definite directions which regulate this ninth-day system, which was the first point which attracted my attention. ⁴⁵⁴But his symptoms are most remarkable. ⁴⁵⁵Did you observe his knuckles?”

⁴⁵⁶I had to confess that I did not.

⁴⁵⁷“Thick and horny in a way which is quite new in my experience. ⁴⁵⁸Always look at the hands first, Watson. ⁴⁵⁹Then cuffs, trouser-knees, and boots. ⁴⁶⁰Very curious knuckles which can only be explained by the mode of progression observed by—” ⁴⁶¹Holmes paused and suddenly clapped his hand to his forehead. ⁴⁶²“Oh, Watson, Watson, what a fool I have been! ⁴⁶³It seems incredible, and yet it must be true. ⁴⁶⁴All points in one direction. ⁴⁶⁵How could I miss seeing the connection of ideas? ⁴⁶⁶Those knuckles—how could I have passed those knuckles? ⁴⁶⁷And the dog! ⁴⁶⁸And the ivy! ⁴⁶⁹It's surely time that I disappeared into that little farm of my dreams. ⁴⁷⁰Look out, Watson! ⁴⁷¹Here he is! ⁴⁷²We shall have the chance of seeing for ourselves.”

⁴⁷³The hall door had slowly opened, and against the lamplit background we saw the tall figure of Professor Presbury. ⁴⁷⁴He was clad in his dressing-gown. ⁴⁷⁵As he stood outlined in the doorway he was erect but leaning forward with dangling arms, as when we saw him last.

⁴⁷⁶Now he stepped forward into the drive, and an extraordinary change came over him. ⁴⁷⁷He sank down into a crouching position and moved along upon his hands and feet, skipping every now and then as if he were overflowing with energy and vitality. ⁴⁷⁸He moved along the face of the house and then round the corner. ⁴⁷⁹As he disappeared Bennett slipped through the hall door and softly followed him.

⁴⁸⁰“Come, Watson, come!” cried Holmes, and we stole as softly as we could through the bushes until we had gained a spot whence we could see the other side of the house, which was bathed in the light of the half-moon. ⁴⁸¹The professor was clearly visible crouching at the foot of the ivy-covered wall. ⁴⁸²As we watched him he suddenly began with incredible agility to ascend it. ⁴⁸³From branch to branch he sprang, sure of foot and firm of grasp, climbing apparently in mere joy at his own powers, with no definite object in view. ⁴⁸⁴With his dressing-gown flapping on each side of him, he looked like some huge bat glued against the side of his own house, a great square dark patch upon the moonlit wall. ⁴⁸⁵Presently he tired of this amusement, and, dropping from branch to branch, he squatted down into the old attitude and moved towards the stables, creeping along in the same strange way as before. ⁴⁸⁶The wolfhound was out now, barking furiously, and more excited than ever when it actually caught sight of its master. ⁴⁸⁷It was straining on its chain and quivering with eagerness and rage. ⁴⁸⁸The professor squatted down very deliberately just out of reach of the hound and began to provoke it in every possible way. ⁴⁸⁹He took handfuls of pebbles from the drive and threw them in the dog's face, prodded him with a stick which he had picked up, flicked his hands about only a few inches from the gaping mouth, and endeavoured in every way to increase the animal's fury, which was already beyond all control. ⁴⁹⁰In all our adventures I do not know that I have ever seen a more strange sight than this impassive and still dignified figure crouching frog-like upon the ground and goading to a wilder exhibition of passion the maddened hound, which ramped and raged in front of him, by all manner of ingenious and calculated cruelty.

⁴⁹¹And then in a moment it happened! ⁴⁹²It was not the chain that broke, but it was the collar that slipped, for it had been made for a thick-necked Newfoundland. ⁴⁹³We heard the rattle of falling metal, and the next instant dog and man were rolling on the ground together, the one roaring in rage, the other screaming in a strange shrill falsetto of terror. ⁴⁹⁴It was a very narrow thing for the professor's life. ⁴⁹⁵The savage creature had him fairly by the throat, its fangs had bitten deep, and he was senseless before we could reach them and drag the two apart. ⁴⁹⁶It might have been a dangerous task for us, but Bennett's voice and presence brought the great wolfhound instantly to reason. ⁴⁹⁷The uproar had brought the sleepy and astonished coachman from his room above the stables. ⁴⁹⁸“I'm not surprised,” said he, shaking his head. ⁴⁹⁹“I've seen him at it before. ⁵⁰⁰I knew the dog would get him sooner or later.”

⁵⁰¹The hound was secured, and together we carried the professor up to his room, where Bennett, who had a medical degree, helped me to dress his torn throat. ⁵⁰²The sharp teeth had passed dangerously near the carotid artery, and the haemorrhage was serious. ⁵⁰³In half an hour the danger was past, I had given the patient an injection of morphia, and he had sunk into deep sleep. ⁵⁰⁴Then, and only then, were we able to look at each other and to take stock of the situation.

⁵⁰⁵“I think a first-class surgeon should see him,” said I.

⁵⁰⁶“For God's sake, no!” cried Bennett. ⁵⁰⁷“At present the scandal is confined to our own household. ⁵⁰⁸It is safe with us. ⁵⁰⁹If it gets beyond these walls it will never stop. ⁵¹⁰Consider his position at the university, his European reputation, the feelings of his daughter.”

⁵¹¹“Quite so,” said Holmes. ⁵¹²“I think it may be quite possible to keep the matter to ourselves, and also to prevent its recurrence now that we have a free hand. ⁵¹³The key from the watch-chain, Mr. Bennett. ⁵¹⁴Macphail will guard the patient and let us know if there is any change. ⁵¹⁵Let us see what we can find in the professor's mysterious box.”

⁵¹⁶There was not much, but there was enough—an empty phial, another nearly full, a hypodermic syringe, several letters in a crabbed, foreign hand. ⁵¹⁷The marks on the envelopes showed that they were those which had disturbed the routine of the secretary, and each was dated from the Commercial Road and signed “A. Dorak.” ⁵¹⁸They were mere invoices to say that a fresh bottle was being sent to Professor Presbury, or receipt to acknowledge money. ⁵¹⁹There was one other envelope, however, in a more

educated hand and bearing the Austrian stamp with the postmark of Prague. ⁵²⁰“Here we have our material!” cried Holmes as he tore out the enclosure.

⁵²¹Honoured Colleague [it ran]:

⁵²²Since your esteemed visit I have thought much of your case, and though in your circumstances there are some special reasons for the treatment, I would none the less enjoin caution, as my results have shown that it is not without danger of a kind.

⁵²³It is possible that the serum of anthropoid would have been better. ⁵²⁴I have, as I explained to you, used black-faced langur because a specimen was accessible. ⁵²⁵Langur is, of course, a crawler and climber, while anthropoid walks erect and is in all ways nearer.

⁵²⁶I beg you to take every possible precaution that there be no premature revelation of the process. ⁵²⁷I have one other client in England, and Dorak is my agent for both.

⁵²⁸Weekly reports will oblige.

⁵²⁹Yours with high esteem,

⁵³⁰H. Lowenstein.

⁵³¹Lowenstein! ⁵³²The name brought back to me the memory of some snippet from a newspaper which spoke of an obscure scientist who was striving in some unknown way for the secret of rejuvenescence and the elixir of life. ⁵³³Lowenstein of Prague! ⁵³⁴Lowenstein with the wondrous strength-giving serum, tabooed by the profession because he refused to reveal its source. ⁵³⁵In a few words I said what I remembered. ⁵³⁶Bennett had taken a manual of zoology from the shelves. ⁵³⁷“Langur,” he read, “the great black-faced monkey of the Himalayan slopes, biggest and most human of climbing monkeys.” ⁵³⁸Many details are added. ⁵³⁹Well, thanks to you, Mr. Holmes, it is very clear that we have traced the evil to its source.”

⁵⁴⁰“The real source,” said Holmes, “lies, of course, in that untimely love affair which gave our impetuous professor the idea that he could only gain his wish by turning himself into a younger man. ⁵⁴¹When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it. ⁵⁴²The highest type of man may revert to the animal if he leaves the straight road of destiny.” ⁵⁴³He sat musing for a little with the phial in his hand, looking at the clear liquid within. ⁵⁴⁴“When I have written to this man and told him that I hold him criminally responsible for the poisons which he circulates, we will have no more trouble. ⁵⁴⁵But it may recur. ⁵⁴⁶Others may find a better way. ⁵⁴⁷There is danger there—a very real danger to humanity. ⁵⁴⁸Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives. ⁵⁴⁹The spiritual would not avoid the call to something higher. ⁵⁵⁰It would be the survival of the least fit. ⁵⁵¹What sort of cesspool may not our poor world become?” ⁵⁵²Suddenly the dreamer disappeared, and Holmes, the man of action, sprang from his chair. ⁵⁵³“I think there is nothing more to be said, Mr. Bennett. ⁵⁵⁴The various incidents will now fit themselves easily into the general scheme. ⁵⁵⁵The dog, of course, was aware of the change far more quickly than you. ⁵⁵⁶His smell would insure that. ⁵⁵⁷It was the monkey, not the professor, whom Roy attacked, just as it was the monkey who teased Roy. ⁵⁵⁸Climbing was a joy to the creature, and it was a mere chance, I take it, that the pastime brought him to the young lady’s window. ⁵⁵⁹There is an early train to town, Watson, but I think we shall just have time for a cup of tea at the Chequers before we catch it.”

The Adventure of the Lion's Mane

¹It is a most singular thing that a problem which was certainly as abstruse and unusual as any which I have faced in my long professional career should have come to me after my retirement, and be brought, as it were, to my very door. ²It occurred after my withdrawal to my little Sussex home, when I had given myself up entirely to that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned during the long years spent amid the gloom of London. ³At this period of my life the good Watson had passed almost beyond my ken. ⁴An occasional week-end visit was the most that I ever saw of him. ⁵Thus I must act as my own chronicler. ⁶Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty! ⁷As it is, however, I must needs tell my tale in my own plain way, showing by my words each step upon the difficult road which lay before me as I searched for the mystery of the Lion's Mane.

⁸My villa is situated upon the southern slope of the downs, commanding a great view of the Channel. ⁹At this point the coast-line is entirely of chalk cliffs, which can only be descended by a single, long, tortuous path, which is steep and slippery. ¹⁰At the bottom of the path lie a hundred yards of pebbles and shingle, even when the tide is at full. ¹¹Here and there, however, there are curves and hollows which make splendid swimming-pools filled afresh with each flow. ¹²This admirable beach extends for some miles in each direction, save only at one point where the little cove and village of Fulworth break the line.

¹³My house is lonely. ¹⁴I, my old housekeeper, and my bees have the estate all to ourselves. ¹⁵Half a mile off, however, is Harold Stackhurst's well-known coaching establishment, The Gables, quite a large place, which contains some score of young fellows preparing for various professions, with a staff of several masters. ¹⁶Stackhurst himself was a well-known rowing Blue in his day, and an excellent all-round scholar. ¹⁷He and I were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation.

¹⁸Towards the end of July, 1907, there was a severe gale, the wind blowing up-channel, heaping the seas to the base of the cliffs and leaving a lagoon at the turn of the tide. ¹⁹On the morning of which I speak the wind had abated, and all Nature was newly washed and fresh. ²⁰It was impossible to work upon so delightful a day, and I strolled out before breakfast to enjoy the exquisite air. ²¹I walked along the cliff path which led to the steep descent to the beach. ²²As I walked I heard a shout behind me, and there was Harold Stackhurst waving his hand in cheery greeting.

²³"What a morning, Mr. Holmes! ²⁴I thought I should see you out."

²⁵"Going for a swim, I see."

²⁶"At your old tricks again," he laughed, patting his bulging pocket. ²⁷"Yes. McPherson started early, and I expect I may find him there."

²⁸Fitzroy McPherson was the science master, a fine upstanding young fellow whose life had been crippled by heart trouble following rheumatic fever. ²⁹He was a natural athlete, however, and excelled in every game which did not throw too great a strain upon him. ³⁰Summer and winter he went for his swim, and, as I am a swimmer myself, I have often joined him.

³¹At this moment we saw the man himself. ³²His head showed above the edge of the cliff where the path ends. ³³Then his whole figure appeared at the top, staggering like a drunken man. ³⁴The next instant he threw up his hands and, with a terrible cry, fell upon his face. ³⁵Stackhurst and I rushed forward—it may have been fifty yards—and turned him on his back. ³⁶He was obviously dying. ³⁷Those glazed

sunken eyes and dreadful livid cheeks could mean nothing else. ³⁸One glimmer of life came into his face for an instant, and he uttered two or three words with an eager air of warning. ³⁹They were slurred and indistinct, but to my ear the last of them, which burst in a shriek from his lips, were “the Lion’s Mane.” ⁴⁰It was utterly irrelevant and unintelligible, and yet I could twist the sound into no other sense. ⁴¹Then he half raised himself from the ground, threw his arms into the air, and fell forward on his side. ⁴²He was dead.

⁴³My companion was paralyzed by the sudden horror of it, but I, as may well be imagined, had every sense on the alert. ⁴⁴And I had need, for it was speedily evident that we were in the presence of an extraordinary case. ⁴⁵The man was dressed only in his Burberry overcoat, his trousers, and an unlaced pair of canvas shoes. ⁴⁶As he fell over, his Burberry, which had been simply thrown round his shoulders, slipped off, exposing his trunk. ⁴⁷We stared at it in amazement. ⁴⁸His back was covered with dark red lines as though he had been terribly flogged by a thin wire scourge. ⁴⁹The instrument with which this punishment had been inflicted was clearly flexible, for the long, angry weals curved round his shoulders and ribs. ⁵⁰There was blood dripping down his chin, for he had bitten through his lower lip in the paroxysm of his agony. ⁵¹His drawn and distorted face told how terrible that agony had been.

⁵²I was kneeling and Stackhurst standing by the body when a shadow fell across us, and we found that Ian Murdoch was by our side. ⁵³Murdoch was the mathematical coach at the establishment, a tall, dark, thin man, so taciturn and aloof that none can be said to have been his friend. ⁵⁴He seemed to live in some high, abstract region of surds and conic sections, with little to connect him with ordinary life. ⁵⁵He was looked upon as an oddity by the students, and would have been their butt, but there was some strange outlandish blood in the man, which showed itself not only in his coal-black eyes and swarthy face but also in occasional outbreaks of temper, which could only be described as ferocious. ⁵⁶On one occasion, being plagued by a little dog belonging to McPherson, he had caught the creature up and hurled it through the plate-glass window, an action for which Stackhurst would certainly have given him his dismissal had he not been a very valuable teacher. ⁵⁷Such was the strange complex man who now appeared beside us. ⁵⁸He seemed to be honestly shocked at the sight before him, though the incident of the dog may show that there was no great sympathy between the dead man and himself.

⁵⁹“Poor fellow! ⁶⁰Poor fellow! ⁶¹What can I do? ⁶²How can I help?”

⁶³“Were you with him? ⁶⁴Can you tell us what has happened?”

⁶⁵“No, no, I was late this morning. ⁶⁶I was not on the beach at all. ⁶⁷I have come straight from The Gables. ⁶⁸What can I do?”

⁶⁹“You can hurry to the police-station at Fulworth. ⁷⁰Report the matter at once.”

⁷¹Without a word he made off at top speed, and I proceeded to take the matter in hand, while Stackhurst, dazed at this tragedy, remained by the body. ⁷²My first task naturally was to note who was on the beach. ⁷³From the top of the path I could see the whole sweep of it, and it was absolutely deserted save that two or three dark figures could be seen far away moving towards the village of Fulworth. ⁷⁴Having satisfied myself upon this point, I walked slowly down the path. ⁷⁵There was clay or soft marl mixed with the chalk, and every here and there I saw the same footstep, both ascending and descending. ⁷⁶No one else had gone down to the beach by this track that morning. ⁷⁷At one place I observed the print of an open hand with the fingers towards the incline. ⁷⁸This could only mean that poor McPherson had fallen as he ascended. ⁷⁹There were rounded depressions, too, which suggested that he had come down upon his knees more than once. ⁸⁰At the bottom of the path was the considerable lagoon left by the retreating tide. ⁸¹At the side of it McPherson had undressed, for there lay his towel on a rock. ⁸²It was folded and dry, so that it would seem that, after all, he had never entered the water. ⁸³Once or twice as I hunted round amid the hard shingle I came on little patches of sand where the print of his canvas shoe, and also of his naked foot, could be seen. ⁸⁴The latter fact proved that he had made all ready to bathe, though the towel indicated that he had not actually done so.

⁸⁵And here was the problem clearly defined—as strange a one as had ever confronted me. ⁸⁶The man had not been on the beach more than a quarter of an hour at the most. ⁸⁷Stackhurst had followed him from The Gables, so there could be no doubt about that. ⁸⁸He had gone to bathe and had stripped, as the naked footsteps showed. ⁸⁹Then he had suddenly huddled on his clothes again—they were all dishevelled and unfastened—and he had returned without bathing, or at any rate without drying himself. ⁹⁰And the reason for his change of purpose had been that he had been scourged in some savage, inhuman fashion, tortured until he bit his lip through in his agony, and was left with only strength enough to crawl away and to die. ⁹¹Who had done this barbarous deed? ⁹²There were, it is true, small grottos and caves in the base of the cliffs, but the low sun shone directly into them, and there was no place for concealment. ⁹³Then, again, there were those distant figures on the beach. ⁹⁴They seemed too far away to have been connected with the crime, and the broad lagoon in which McPherson had intended to bathe lay between him and them, lapping up to the rocks. ⁹⁵On the sea two or three fishing-boats were at no great distance. ⁹⁶Their occupants might be examined at our leisure. ⁹⁷There were several roads for inquiry, but none which led to any very obvious goal.

⁹⁸When I at last returned to the body I found that a little group of wondering folk had gathered round it. ⁹⁹Stackhurst was, of course, still there, and Ian Murdoch had just arrived with Anderson, the village constable, a big, ginger-moustached man of the slow, solid Sussex breed—a breed which covers much good sense under a heavy, silent exterior. ¹⁰⁰He listened to everything, took note of all we said, and finally drew me aside.

¹⁰¹“I’d be glad of your advice, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁰²This is a big thing for me to handle, and I’ll hear of it from Lewes if I go wrong.”

¹⁰³I advised him to send for his immediate superior, and for a doctor; also to allow nothing to be moved, and as few fresh footmarks as possible to be made, until they came. ¹⁰⁴In the meantime I searched the dead man’s pockets. ¹⁰⁵There were his handkerchief, a large knife, and a small folding card-case. ¹⁰⁶From this projected a slip of paper, which I unfolded and handed to the constable. ¹⁰⁷There was written on it in a scrawling, feminine hand:

¹⁰⁸I will be there, you may be sure.

¹⁰⁹Maudie.

¹¹⁰It read like a love affair, an assignation, though when and where were a blank. ¹¹¹The constable replaced it in the card-case and returned it with the other things to the pockets of the Burberry. ¹¹²Then, as nothing more suggested itself, I walked back to my house for breakfast, having first arranged that the base of the cliffs should be thoroughly searched.

¹¹³Stackhurst was round in an hour or two to tell me that the body had been removed to The Gables, where the inquest would be held. ¹¹⁴He brought with him some serious and definite news. ¹¹⁵As I expected, nothing had been found in the small caves below the cliff, but he had examined the papers in McPherson’s desk, and there were several which showed an intimate correspondence with a certain Miss Maud Bellamy, of Fulworth. ¹¹⁶We had then established the identity of the writer of the note.

¹¹⁷“The police have the letters,” he explained. ¹¹⁸“I could not bring them. ¹¹⁹But there is no doubt that it was a serious love affair. ¹²⁰I see no reason, however, to connect it with that horrible happening save, indeed, that the lady had made an appointment with him.”

¹²¹“But hardly at a bathing-pool which all of you were in the habit of using,” I remarked.

¹²²“It is mere chance,” said he, “that several of the students were not with McPherson.”

¹²³“Was it mere chance?”

¹²⁴Stackhurst knit his brows in thought.

¹²⁵“Ian Murdoch held them back,” said he. ¹²⁶“He would insist upon some algebraic demonstration before breakfast. ¹²⁷Poor chap, he is dreadfully cut up about it all.”

¹²⁸“And yet I gather that they were not friends.”

¹²⁹“At one time they were not. ¹³⁰But for a year or more Murdoch has been as near to McPherson as he ever could be to anyone. ¹³¹He is not of a very sympathetic disposition by nature.”

¹³²“So I understand. ¹³³I seem to remember your telling me once about a quarrel over the ill-usage of a dog.”

¹³⁴“That blew over all right.”

¹³⁵“But left some vindictive feeling, perhaps.”

¹³⁶“No, no, I am sure they were real friends.”

¹³⁷“Well, then, we must explore the matter of the girl. ¹³⁸Do you know her?”

¹³⁹“Everyone knows her. ¹⁴⁰She is the beauty of the neighbourhood—a real beauty, Holmes, who would draw attention everywhere. ¹⁴¹I knew that McPherson was attracted by her, but I had no notion that it had gone so far as these letters would seem to indicate.”

¹⁴²“But who is she?”

¹⁴³“She is the daughter of old Tom Bellamy, who owns all the boats and bathing-cots at Fulworth. ¹⁴⁴He was a fisherman to start with, but is now a man of some substance. ¹⁴⁵He and his son William run the business.”

¹⁴⁶“Shall we walk into Fulworth and see them?”

¹⁴⁷“On what pretext?”

¹⁴⁸“Oh, we can easily find a pretext. ¹⁴⁹After all, this poor man did not ill-use himself in this outrageous way. ¹⁵⁰Some human hand was on the handle of that scourge, if indeed it was a scourge which inflicted the injuries. ¹⁵¹His circle of acquaintances in this lonely place was surely limited. ¹⁵²Let us follow it up in every direction and we can hardly fail to come upon the motive, which in turn should lead us to the criminal.”

¹⁵³It would have been a pleasant walk across the thyme-scented downs had our minds not been poisoned by the tragedy we had witnessed. ¹⁵⁴The village of Fulworth lies in a hollow curving in a semicircle round the bay. ¹⁵⁵Behind the old-fashioned hamlet several modern houses have been built upon the rising ground. ¹⁵⁶It was to one of these that Stackhurst guided me.

¹⁵⁷“That's The Haven, as Bellamy called it. ¹⁵⁸The one with the corner tower and slate roof. ¹⁵⁹Not bad for a man who started with nothing but— ¹⁶⁰By Jove, look at that!”

¹⁶¹The garden gate of The Haven had opened and a man had emerged. ¹⁶²There was no mistaking that tall, angular, straggling figure. ¹⁶³It was Ian Murdoch, the mathematician. ¹⁶⁴A moment later we confronted him upon the road.

¹⁶⁵“Hullo!” said Stackhurst. ¹⁶⁶The man nodded, gave us a sideways glance from his curious dark eyes, and would have passed us, but his principal pulled him up.

¹⁶⁷“What were you doing there?” he asked.

¹⁶⁸Murdoch's face flushed with anger. ¹⁶⁹“I am your subordinate, sir, under your roof. ¹⁷⁰I am not aware that I owe you any account of my private actions.”

¹⁷¹Stackhurst's nerves were near the surface after all he had endured. ¹⁷²Otherwise, perhaps, he would have waited. ¹⁷³Now he lost his temper completely.

¹⁷⁴"In the circumstances your answer is pure impertinence, Mr. Murdoch."

¹⁷⁵"Your own question might perhaps come under the same heading."

¹⁷⁶"This is not the first time that I have had to overlook your insubordinate ways. ¹⁷⁷It will certainly be the last. ¹⁷⁸You will kindly make fresh arrangements for your future as speedily as you can."

¹⁷⁹"I had intended to do so. ¹⁸⁰I have lost to-day the only person who made The Gables habitable."

¹⁸¹He strode off upon his way, while Stackhurst, with angry eyes, stood glaring after him. ¹⁸²"Is he not an impossible, intolerable man?" he cried.

¹⁸³The one thing that impressed itself forcibly upon my mind was that Mr. Ian Murdoch was taking the first chance to open a path of escape from the scene of the crime. ¹⁸⁴Suspicion, vague and nebulous, was now beginning to take outline in my mind. ¹⁸⁵Perhaps the visit to the Bellamys might throw some further light upon the matter. ¹⁸⁶Stackhurst pulled himself together, and we went forward to the house.

¹⁸⁷Mr. Bellamy proved to be a middle-aged man with a flaming red beard. ¹⁸⁸He seemed to be in a very angry mood, and his face was soon as florid as his hair.

¹⁸⁹"No, sir, I do not desire any particulars. ¹⁹⁰My son here"—indicating a powerful young man, with a heavy, sullen face, in the corner of the sitting-room—"is of one mind with me that Mr. McPherson's attentions to Maud were insulting. ¹⁹¹Yes, sir, the word 'marriage' was never mentioned, and yet there were letters and meetings, and a great deal more of which neither of us could approve. ¹⁹²She has no mother, and we are her only guardians. ¹⁹³We are determined—"

¹⁹⁴But the words were taken from his mouth by the appearance of the lady herself. ¹⁹⁵There was no gainsaying that she would have graced any assembly in the world. ¹⁹⁶Who could have imagined that so rare a flower would grow from such a root and in such an atmosphere? ¹⁹⁷Women have seldom been an attraction to me, for my brain has always governed my heart, but I could not look upon her perfect clear-cut face, with all the soft freshness of the downlands in her delicate colouring, without realizing that no young man would cross her path unscathed. ¹⁹⁸Such was the girl who had pushed open the door and stood now, wide-eyed and intense, in front of Harold Stackhurst.

¹⁹⁹"I know already that Fitzroy is dead," she said. ²⁰⁰"Do not be afraid to tell me the particulars."

²⁰¹"This other gentleman of yours let us know the news," explained the father.

²⁰²"There is no reason why my sister should be brought into the matter," growled the younger man.

²⁰³The sister turned a sharp, fierce look upon him. ²⁰⁴"This is my business, William. ²⁰⁵Kindly leave me to manage it in my own way. ²⁰⁶By all accounts there has been a crime committed. ²⁰⁷If I can help to show who did it, it is the least I can do for him who is gone."

²⁰⁸She listened to a short account from my companion, with a composed concentration which showed me that she possessed strong character as well as great beauty. ²⁰⁹Maud Bellamy will always remain in my memory as a most complete and remarkable woman. ²¹⁰It seems that she already knew me by sight, for she turned to me at the end.

²¹¹"Bring them to justice, Mr. Holmes. ²¹²You have my sympathy and my help, whoever they may be."

²¹³It seemed to me that she glanced defiantly at her father and brother as she spoke.

²¹⁴"Thank you," said I. ²¹⁵"I value a woman's instinct in such matters. ²¹⁶You use the word 'they.' ²¹⁷You think that more than one was concerned?"

²¹⁸“I knew Mr. McPherson well enough to be aware that he was a brave and a strong man. ²¹⁹No single person could ever have inflicted such an outrage upon him.”

²²⁰“Might I have one word with you alone?”

²²¹“I tell you, Maud, not to mix yourself up in the matter,” cried her father angrily.

²²²She looked at me helplessly. ²²³“What can I do?”

²²⁴“The whole world will know the facts presently, so there can be no harm if I discuss them here,” said I. ²²⁵“I should have preferred privacy, but if your father will not allow it he must share the deliberations.”

²²⁶Then I spoke of the note which had been found in the dead man's pocket. ²²⁷“It is sure to be produced at the inquest. ²²⁸May I ask you to throw any light upon it that you can?”

²²⁹“I see no reason for mystery,” she answered. ²³⁰“We were engaged to be married, and we only kept it secret because Fitzroy's uncle, who is very old and said to be dying, might have disinherited him if he had married against his wish. ²³¹There was no other reason.”

²³²“You could have told us,” growled Mr. Bellamy.

²³³“So I would, father, if you had ever shown sympathy.”

²³⁴“I object to my girl picking up with men outside her own station.”

²³⁵“It was your prejudice against him which prevented us from telling you. ²³⁶As to this appointment”—she fumbled in her dress and produced a crumpled note—“it was in answer to this.”

²³⁷Dearest [ran the message]:

²³⁸The old place on the beach just after sunset on Tuesday. ²³⁹It is the only time I can get away.

²⁴⁰F. M.

²⁴¹“Tuesday was to-day, and I had meant to meet him to-night.”

²⁴²I turned over the paper. ²⁴³“This never came by post. ²⁴⁴How did you get it?”

²⁴⁵“I would rather not answer that question. ²⁴⁶It has really nothing to do with the matter which you are investigating. ²⁴⁷But anything which bears upon that I will most freely answer.”

²⁴⁸She was as good as her word, but there was nothing which was helpful in our investigation. ²⁴⁹She had no reason to think that her fiance had any hidden enemy, but she admitted that she had had several warm admirers.

²⁵⁰“May I ask if Mr. Ian Murdoch was one of them?”

²⁵¹She blushed and seemed confused.

²⁵²“There was a time when I thought he was. ²⁵³But that was all changed when he understood the relations between Fitzroy and myself.”

²⁵⁴Again the shadow round this strange man seemed to me to be taking more definite shape. ²⁵⁵His record must be examined. ²⁵⁶His rooms must be privately searched. ²⁵⁷Stackhurst was a willing collaborator, for in his mind also suspicions were forming. ²⁵⁸We returned from our visit to The Haven with the hope that one free end of this tangled skein was already in our hands.

²⁵⁹A week passed. ²⁶⁰The inquest had thrown no light upon the matter and had been adjourned for further evidence. ²⁶¹Stackhurst had made discreet inquiry about his subordinate, and there had been a superficial search of his room, but without result. ²⁶²Personally, I had gone over the whole ground again, both

physically and mentally, but with no new conclusions. ²⁶³In all my chronicles the reader will find no case which brought me so completely to the limit of my powers. ²⁶⁴Even my imagination could conceive no solution to the mystery. ²⁶⁵And then there came the incident of the dog.

²⁶⁶It was my old housekeeper who heard of it first by that strange wireless by which such people collect the news of the countryside.

²⁶⁷“Sad story this, sir, about Mr. McPherson's dog,” said she one evening.

²⁶⁸I do not encourage such conversations, but the words arrested my attention.

²⁶⁹“What of Mr. McPherson's dog?”

²⁷⁰“Dead, sir. ²⁷¹Died of grief for its master.”

²⁷²“Who told you this?”

²⁷³“Why, sir, everyone is talking of it. ²⁷⁴It took on terrible, and has eaten nothing for a week. ²⁷⁵Then to-day two of the young gentlemen from The Gables found it dead—down on the beach, sir, at the very place where its master met his end.”

²⁷⁶“At the very place.” ²⁷⁷The words stood out clear in my memory. ²⁷⁸Some dim perception that the matter was vital rose in my mind. ²⁷⁹That the dog should die was after the beautiful, faithful nature of dogs. ²⁸⁰But “in the very place”! ²⁸¹Why should this lonely beach be fatal to it? ²⁸²Was it possible that it also had been sacrificed to some revengeful feud? ²⁸³Was it possible—? ²⁸⁴Yes, the perception was dim, but already something was building up in my mind. ²⁸⁵In a few minutes I was on my way to The Gables, where I found Stackhurst in his study. ²⁸⁶At my request he sent for Sudbury and Blount, the two students who had found the dog.

²⁸⁷“Yes, it lay on the very edge of the pool,” said one of them. ²⁸⁸“It must have followed the trail of its dead master.”

²⁸⁹I saw the faithful little creature, an Airedale terrier, laid out upon the mat in the hall. ²⁹⁰The body was stiff and rigid, the eyes projecting, and the limbs contorted. ²⁹¹There was agony in every line of it.

²⁹²From The Gables I walked down to the bathing-pool. ²⁹³The sun had sunk and the shadow of the great cliff lay black across the water, which glimmered dully like a sheet of lead. ²⁹⁴The place was deserted and there was no sign of life save for two sea-birds circling and screaming overhead. ²⁹⁵In the fading light I could dimly make out the little dog's spoor upon the sand round the very rock on which his master's towel had been laid. ²⁹⁶For a long time I stood in deep meditation while the shadows grew darker around me. ²⁹⁷My mind was filled with racing thoughts. ²⁹⁸You have known what it was to be in a nightmare in which you feel that there is some all-important thing for which you search and which you know is there, though it remains forever just beyond your reach. ²⁹⁹That was how I felt that evening as I stood alone by that place of death. ³⁰⁰Then at last I turned and walked slowly homeward.

³⁰¹I had just reached the top of the path when it came to me. ³⁰²Like a flash, I remembered the thing for which I had so eagerly and vainly grasped. ³⁰³You will know, or Watson has written in vain, that I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. ³⁰⁴My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein—so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there. ³⁰⁵I had known that there was something which might bear upon this matter. ³⁰⁶It was still vague, but at least I knew how I could make it clear. ³⁰⁷It was monstrous, incredible, and yet it was always a possibility. ³⁰⁸I would test it to the full.

³⁰⁹There is a great garret in my little house which is stuffed with books. ³¹⁰It was into this that I plunged and rummaged for an hour. ³¹¹At the end of that time I emerged with a little chocolate and silver volume.

³¹²Eagerly I turned up the chapter of which I had a dim remembrance. ³¹³Yes, it was indeed a far-fetched

and unlikely proposition, and yet I could not be at rest until I had made sure if it might, indeed, be so.
³¹⁴It was late when I retired, with my mind eagerly awaiting the work of the morrow.

³¹⁵But that work met with an annoying interruption. ³¹⁶I had hardly swallowed my early cup of tea and was starting for the beach when I had a call from Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary—a steady, solid, bovine man with thoughtful eyes, which looked at me now with a very troubled expression.

³¹⁷“I know your immense experience, sir,” said he. ³¹⁸“This is quite unofficial, of course, and need go no farther. ³¹⁹But I am fairly up against it in this McPherson case. ³²⁰The question is, shall I make an arrest, or shall I not?”

³²¹“Meaning Mr. Ian Murdoch?”

³²²“Yes, sir. ³²³There is really no one else when you come to think of it. ³²⁴That's the advantage of this solitude. ³²⁵We narrow it down to a very small compass. ³²⁶If he did not do it, then who did?”

³²⁷“What have you against him?”

³²⁸He had gleaned along the same furrows as I had. ³²⁹There was Murdoch's character and the mystery which seemed to hang round the man. ³³⁰His furious bursts of temper, as shown in the incident of the dog. ³³¹The fact that he had quarrelled with McPherson in the past, and that there was some reason to think that he might have resented his attentions to Miss Bellamy. ³³²He had all my points, but no fresh ones, save that Murdoch seemed to be making every preparation for departure.

³³³“What would my position be if I let him slip away with all this evidence against him?” ³³⁴The burly, phlegmatic man was sorely troubled in his mind.

³³⁵“Consider,” I said, “all the essential gaps in your case. ³³⁶On the morning of the crime he can surely prove an alibi. ³³⁷He had been with his scholars till the last moment, and within a few minutes of McPherson's appearance he came upon us from behind. ³³⁸Then bear in mind the absolute impossibility that he could single-handed have inflicted this outrage upon a man quite as strong as himself. ³³⁹Finally, there is this question of the instrument with which these injuries were inflicted.”

³⁴⁰“What could it be but a scourge or flexible whip of some sort?”

³⁴¹“Have you examined the marks?” I asked.

³⁴²“I have seen them. ³⁴³So has the doctor.”

³⁴⁴“But I have examined them very carefully with a lens. ³⁴⁵They have peculiarities.”

³⁴⁶“What are they, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁴⁷I stepped to my bureau and brought out an enlarged photograph. ³⁴⁸“This is my method in such cases,” I explained.

³⁴⁹“You certainly do things thoroughly, Mr. Holmes.”

³⁵⁰“I should hardly be what I am if I did not. ³⁵¹Now let us consider this weal which extends round the right shoulder. ³⁵²Do you observe nothing remarkable?”

³⁵³“I can't say I do.”

³⁵⁴“Surely it is evident that it is unequal in its intensity. ³⁵⁵There is a dot of extravasated blood here, and another there. ³⁵⁶There are similar indications in this other weal down here. ³⁵⁷What can that mean?”

³⁵⁸“I have no idea. ³⁵⁹Have you?”

³⁶⁰“Perhaps I have. ³⁶¹Perhaps I haven't. ³⁶²I may be able to say more soon. ³⁶³Anything which will define what made that mark will bring us a long way towards the criminal.”

³⁶⁴“It is, of course, an absurd idea,” said the policeman, “but if a red-hot net of wire had been laid across the back, then these better marked points would represent where the meshes crossed each other.”

³⁶⁵“A most ingenious comparison. ³⁶⁶Or shall we say a very stiff cat-o'-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it?”

³⁶⁷“By Jove, Mr. Holmes, I think you have hit it.”

³⁶⁸“Or there may be some very different cause, Mr. Bardle. ³⁶⁹But your case is far too weak for an arrest. ³⁷⁰Besides, we have those last words—the ‘Lion's Mane.’”

³⁷¹“I have wondered whether Ian—”

³⁷²“Yes, I have considered that. ³⁷³If the second word had borne any resemblance to Murdoch—but it did not. ³⁷⁴He gave it almost in a shriek. ³⁷⁵I am sure that it was ‘Mane.’”

³⁷⁶“Have you no alternative, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁷⁷“Perhaps I have. ³⁷⁸But I do not care to discuss it until there is something more solid to discuss.”

³⁷⁹“And when will that be?”

³⁸⁰“In an hour—possibly less.”

³⁸¹The inspector rubbed his chin and looked at me with dubious eyes.

³⁸²“I wish I could see what was in your mind, Mr. Holmes. ³⁸³Perhaps it's those fishing-boats.”

³⁸⁴“No, no, they were too far out.”

³⁸⁵“Well, then, is it Bellamy and that big son of his? ³⁸⁶They were not too sweet upon Mr. McPherson. ³⁸⁷Could they have done him a mischief?”

³⁸⁸“No, no, you won't draw me until I am ready,” said I with a smile. ³⁸⁹“Now, Inspector, we each have our own work to do. ³⁹⁰Perhaps if you were to meet me here at midday—”

³⁹¹So far we had got when there came the tremendous interruption which was the beginning of the end.

³⁹²My outer door was flung open, there were blundering footsteps in the passage, and Ian Murdoch staggered into the room, pallid, dishevelled, his clothes in wild disorder, clawing with his bony hands at the furniture to hold himself erect. ³⁹³“Brandy! ³⁹⁴Brandy!” he gasped, and fell groaning upon the sofa.

³⁹⁵He was not alone. ³⁹⁶Behind him came Stackhurst, hatless and panting, almost as distraught as his companion.

³⁹⁷“Yes, yes, brandy!” he cried. ³⁹⁸“The man is at his last gasp. ³⁹⁹It was all I could do to bring him here. ⁴⁰⁰He fainted twice upon the way.”

⁴⁰¹Half a tumbler of the raw spirit brought about a wondrous change. ⁴⁰²He pushed himself up on one arm and swung his coat from his shoulders. ⁴⁰³“For God's sake, oil, opium, morphia!” he cried. ⁴⁰⁴“Anything to ease this infernal agony!”

⁴⁰⁵The inspector and I cried out at the sight. ⁴⁰⁶There, crisscrossed upon the man's naked shoulder, was the same strange reticulated pattern of red, inflamed lines which had been the death-mark of Fitzroy McPherson.

⁴⁰⁷The pain was evidently terrible and was more than local, for the sufferer's breathing would stop for a time, his face would turn black, and then with loud gasps he would clap his hand to his heart, while his brow dropped beads of sweat. ⁴⁰⁸At any moment he might die. ⁴⁰⁹More and more brandy was poured down his throat, each fresh dose bringing him back to life. ⁴¹⁰Pads of cotton-wool soaked in salad-oil seemed to take the agony from the strange wounds. ⁴¹¹At last his head fell heavily upon the cushion. ⁴¹²Exhausted Nature had taken refuge in its last storehouse of vitality. ⁴¹³It was half a sleep and half a faint, but at least it was ease from pain.

⁴¹⁴To question him had been impossible, but the moment we were assured of his condition Stackhurst turned upon me.

⁴¹⁵"My God!" he cried, "what is it, Holmes? ⁴¹⁶What is it?"

⁴¹⁷"Where did you find him?"

⁴¹⁸"Down on the beach. ⁴¹⁹Exactly where poor McPherson met his end. ⁴²⁰If this man's heart had been weak as McPherson's was, he would not be here now. ⁴²¹More than once I thought he was gone as I brought him up. ⁴²²It was too far to The Gables, so I made for you."

⁴²³"Did you see him on the beach?"

⁴²⁴"I was walking on the cliff when I heard his cry. ⁴²⁵He was at the edge of the water, reeling about like a drunken man. ⁴²⁶I ran down, threw some clothes about him, and brought him up. ⁴²⁷For heaven's sake, Holmes, use all the powers you have and spare no pains to lift the curse from this place, for life is becoming unendurable. ⁴²⁸Can you, with all your world-wide reputation, do nothing for us?"

⁴²⁹"I think I can, Stackhurst. ⁴³⁰Come with me now! ⁴³¹And you, Inspector, come along! ⁴³²We will see if we cannot deliver this murderer into your hands."

⁴³³Leaving the unconscious man in the charge of my housekeeper, we all three went down to the deadly lagoon. ⁴³⁴On the shingle there was piled a little heap of towels and clothes left by the stricken man. ⁴³⁵Slowly I walked round the edge of the water, my comrades in Indian file behind me. ⁴³⁶Most of the pool was quite shallow, but under the cliff where the beach was hollowed out it was four or five feet deep. ⁴³⁷It was to this part that a swimmer would naturally go, for it formed a beautiful pellucid green pool as clear as crystal. ⁴³⁸A line of rocks lay above it at the base of the cliff, and along this I led the way, peering eagerly into the depths beneath me. ⁴³⁹I had reached the deepest and stillest pool when my eyes caught that for which they were searching, and I burst into a shout of triumph.

⁴⁴⁰"Cyanea!" I cried. ⁴⁴¹"Cyanea! ⁴⁴²Behold the Lion's Mane!"

⁴⁴³The strange object at which I pointed did indeed look like a tangled mass torn from the mane of a lion. ⁴⁴⁴It lay upon a rocky shelf some three feet under the water, a curious waving, vibrating, hairy creature with streaks of silver among its yellow tresses. ⁴⁴⁵It pulsed with a slow, heavy dilation and contraction.

⁴⁴⁶"It has done mischief enough. ⁴⁴⁷Its day is over!" I cried. ⁴⁴⁸"Help me, Stackhurst! ⁴⁴⁹Let us end the murderer forever."

⁴⁵⁰There was a big boulder just above the ledge, and we pushed it until it fell with a tremendous splash into the water. ⁴⁵¹When the ripples had cleared we saw that it had settled upon the ledge below. ⁴⁵²One flapping edge of yellow membrane showed that our victim was beneath it. ⁴⁵³A thick oily scum oozed out from below the stone and stained the water round, rising slowly to the surface.

⁴⁵⁴"Well, this gets me!" cried the inspector. ⁴⁵⁵"What was it, Mr. Holmes? ⁴⁵⁶I'm born and bred in these parts, but I never saw such a thing. ⁴⁵⁷It don't belong to Sussex."

⁴⁵⁸“Just as well for Sussex,” I remarked. ⁴⁵⁹“It may have been the southwest gale that brought it up. ⁴⁶⁰Come back to my house, both of you, and I will give you the terrible experience of one who has good reason to remember his own meeting with the same peril of the seas.”

⁴⁶¹When we reached my study we found that Murdoch was so far recovered that he could sit up. ⁴⁶²He was dazed in mind, and every now and then was shaken by a paroxysm of pain. ⁴⁶³In broken words he explained that he had no notion what had occurred to him, save that terrific pangs had suddenly shot through him, and that it had taken all his fortitude to reach the bank.

⁴⁶⁴“Here is a book,” I said, taking up the little volume, “which first brought light into what might have been forever dark. ⁴⁶⁵It is *Out of Doors*, by the famous observer, J. G. Wood. ⁴⁶⁶Wood himself very nearly perished from contact with this vile creature, so he wrote with a very full knowledge. ⁴⁶⁷*Cyanea capillata* is the miscreant's full name, and he can be as dangerous to life as, and far more painful than, the bite of the cobra. ⁴⁶⁸Let me briefly give this extract.

⁴⁶⁹“If the bather should see a loose roundish mass of tawny membranes and fibres, something like very large handfuls of lion's mane and silver paper, let him beware, for this is the fearful stinger, *Cyanea capillata*.

⁴⁷⁰Could our sinister acquaintance be more clearly described?

⁴⁷¹“He goes on to tell of his own encounter with one when swimming off the coast of Kent. ⁴⁷²He found that the creature radiated almost invisible filaments to the distance of fifty feet, and that anyone within that circumference from the deadly centre was in danger of death. ⁴⁷³Even at a distance the effect upon Wood was almost fatal.

⁴⁷⁴“The multitudinous threads caused light scarlet lines upon the skin which on closer examination resolved into minute dots or pustules, each dot charged as it were with a red-hot needle making its way through the nerves.

⁴⁷⁵“The local pain was, as he explains, the least part of the exquisite torment.

⁴⁷⁶“Pangs shot through the chest, causing me to fall as if struck by a bullet. ⁴⁷⁷The pulsation would cease, and then the heart would give six or seven leaps as if it would force its way through the chest.

⁴⁷⁸“It nearly killed him, although he had only been exposed to it in the disturbed ocean and not in the narrow calm waters of a bathing-pool. ⁴⁷⁹He says that he could hardly recognize himself afterwards, so white, wrinkled and shrivelled was his face. ⁴⁸⁰He gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seems to have saved his life. ⁴⁸¹There is the book, Inspector. ⁴⁸²I leave it with you, and you cannot doubt that it contains a full explanation of the tragedy of poor McPherson.”

⁴⁸³“And incidentally exonerates me,” remarked Ian Murdoch with a wry smile. ⁴⁸⁴“I do not blame you, Inspector, nor you, Mr. Holmes, for your suspicions were natural. ⁴⁸⁵I feel that on the very eve of my arrest I have only cleared myself by sharing the fate of my poor friend.”

⁴⁸⁶“No, Mr. Murdoch. ⁴⁸⁷I was already upon the track, and had I been out as early as I intended I might well have saved you from this terrific experience.”

⁴⁸⁸“But how did you know, Mr. Holmes?”

⁴⁸⁹“I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles. ⁴⁹⁰That phrase ‘the Lion's Mane’ haunted my mind. ⁴⁹¹I knew that I had seen it somewhere in an unexpected context. ⁴⁹²You have seen that it does describe the creature. ⁴⁹³I have no doubt that it was floating on the water when McPherson saw it, and that this phrase was the only one by which he could convey to us a warning as to the creature which had been his death.”

⁴⁹⁴“Then I, at least, am cleared,” said Murdoch, rising slowly to his feet. ⁴⁹⁵“There are one or two words of explanation which I should give, for I know the direction in which your inquiries have run. ⁴⁹⁶It is true that I loved this lady, but from the day when she chose my friend McPherson my one desire was to help her to happiness. ⁴⁹⁷I was well content to stand aside and act as their go-between. ⁴⁹⁸Often I carried their messages, and it was because I was in their confidence and because she was so dear to me that I hastened to tell her of my friend's death, lest someone should forestall me in a more sudden and heartless manner. ⁴⁹⁹She would not tell you, sir, of our relations lest you should disapprove and I might suffer. ⁵⁰⁰But with your leave I must try to get back to The Gables, for my bed will be very welcome.”

⁵⁰¹Stackhurst held out his hand. ⁵⁰²“Our nerves have all been at concert-pitch,” said he. ⁵⁰³“Forgive what is past, Murdoch. ⁵⁰⁴We shall understand each other better in the future.” ⁵⁰⁵They passed out together with their arms linked in friendly fashion. ⁵⁰⁶The inspector remained, staring at me in silence with his ox-like eyes.

⁵⁰⁷“Well, you've done it!” he cried at last. ⁵⁰⁸“I had read of you, but I never believed it. ⁵⁰⁹It's wonderful!”

⁵¹⁰I was forced to shake my head. ⁵¹¹To accept such praise was to lower one's own standards.

⁵¹²“I was slow at the outset—culpably slow. ⁵¹³Had the body been found in the water I could hardly have missed it. ⁵¹⁴It was the towel which misled me. ⁵¹⁵The poor fellow had never thought to dry himself, and so I in turn was led to believe that he had never been in the water. ⁵¹⁶Why, then, should the attack of any water creature suggest itself to me? ⁵¹⁷That was where I went astray. ⁵¹⁸Well, well, Inspector, I often ventured to chaff you gentlemen of the police force, but *Cyanea capillata* very nearly avenged Scotland Yard.”

The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger

¹When one considers that Mr. Sherlock Holmes was in active practice for twenty-three years, and that during seventeen of these I was allowed to cooperate with him and to keep notes of his doings, it will be clear that I have a mass of material at my command. ²The problem has always been not to find but to choose. ³There is the long row of year-books which fill a shelf, and there are the dispatch-cases filled with documents, a perfect quarry for the student not only of crime but of the social and official scandals of the late Victorian era. ⁴Concerning these latter, I may say that the writers of agonized letters, who beg that the honour of their families or the reputation of famous forebears may not be touched, have nothing to fear. ⁵The discretion and high sense of professional honour which have always distinguished my friend are still at work in the choice of these memoirs, and no confidence will be abused. ⁶I deprecate, however, in the strongest way the attempts which have been made lately to get at and to destroy these papers. ⁷The source of these outrages is known, and if they are repeated I have Mr. Holmes's authority for saying that the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant will be given to the public. ⁸There is at least one reader who will understand.

⁹It is not reasonable to suppose that every one of these cases gave Holmes the opportunity of showing those curious gifts of instinct and observation which I have endeavoured to set forth in these memoirs. ¹⁰Sometimes he had with much effort to pick the fruit, sometimes it fell easily into his lap. ¹¹But the most terrible human tragedies were often involved in those cases which brought him the fewest personal opportunities, and it is one of these which I now desire to record. ¹²In telling it, I have made a slight change of name and place, but otherwise the facts are as stated.

¹³One forenoon—it was late in 1896—I received a hurried note from Holmes asking for my attendance. ¹⁴When I arrived I found him seated in a smoke-laden atmosphere, with an elderly, motherly woman of the buxom landlady type in the corresponding chair in front of him.

¹⁵“This is Mrs. Merrilow, of South Brixton,” said my friend with a wave of the hand. ¹⁶“Mrs. Merrilow does not object to tobacco, Watson, if you wish to indulge your filthy habits. ¹⁷Mrs. Merrilow has an interesting story to tell which may well lead to further developments in which your presence may be useful.”

¹⁸“Anything I can do—”

¹⁹“You will understand, Mrs. Merrilow, that if I come to Mrs. Ronder I should prefer to have a witness. ²⁰You will make her understand that before we arrive.”

²¹“Lord bless you, Mr. Holmes,” said our visitor, “she is that anxious to see you that you might bring the whole parish at your heels!”

²²“Then we shall come early in the afternoon. ²³Let us see that we have our facts correct before we start. ²⁴If we go over them it will help Dr. Watson to understand the situation. ²⁵You say that Mrs. Ronder has been your lodger for seven years and that you have only once seen her face.”

²⁶“And I wish to God I had not!” said Mrs. Merrilow.

²⁷“It was, I understand, terribly mutilated.”

²⁸“Well, Mr. Holmes, you would hardly say it was a face at all. ²⁹That's how it looked. ³⁰Our milkman got a glimpse of her once peeping out of the upper window, and he dropped his tin and the milk all over the front garden. ³¹That is the kind of face it is. ³²When I saw her—I happened on her unawares—she covered up quick, and then she said, ‘Now, Mrs. Merrilow, you know at last why it is that I never raise my veil.’”

³³“Do you know anything about her history?”

³⁴“Nothing at all.”

³⁵“Did she give references when she came?”

³⁶“No, sir, but she gave hard cash, and plenty of it. ³⁷A quarter's rent right down on the table in advance and no arguing about terms. ³⁸In these times a poor woman like me can't afford to turn down a chance like that.”

³⁹“Did she give any reason for choosing your house?”

⁴⁰“Mine stands well back from the road and is more private than most. ⁴¹Then, again, I only take the one, and I have no family of my own. ⁴²I reckon she had tried others and found that mine suited her best. ⁴³It's privacy she is after, and she is ready to pay for it.”

⁴⁴“You say that she never showed her face from first to last save on the one accidental occasion. ⁴⁵Well, it is a very remarkable story, most remarkable, and I don't wonder that you want it examined.”

⁴⁶“I don't, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁷I am quite satisfied so long as I get my rent. ⁴⁸You could not have a quieter lodger, or one who gives less trouble.”

⁴⁹“Then what has brought matters to a head?”

⁵⁰“Her health, Mr. Holmes. ⁵¹She seems to be wasting away. ⁵²And there's something terrible on her mind. ⁵³‘Murder!’ she cries. ⁵⁴‘Murder!’ ⁵⁵And once I heard her: ‘You cruel beast! ⁵⁶You monster!’ she cried. ⁵⁷It was in the night, and it fair rang through the house and sent the shivers through me. ⁵⁸So I went to her in the morning. ⁵⁹‘Mrs. Ronder,’ I says, ‘if you have anything that is troubling your soul, there's the clergy,’ I says, ‘and there's the police. ⁶⁰Between them you should get some help.’ ⁶¹‘For God's sake, not the police!’ says she, ‘and the clergy can't change what is past. ⁶²And yet,’ she says, ‘it would ease my mind if someone knew the truth before I died.’ ⁶³‘Well,’ says I, ‘if you won't have the regulars, there is this detective man what we read about’—beggin' your pardon, Mr. Holmes. ⁶⁴And she, she fair jumped at it. ⁶⁵‘That's the man,’ says she. ⁶⁶‘I wonder I never thought of it before. ⁶⁷Bring him here, Mrs. Merrilow, and if he won't come, tell him I am the wife of Ronder's wild beast show. ⁶⁸Say that, and give him the name Abbas Parva. ⁶⁹Here it is as she wrote it, Abbas Parva. ⁷⁰‘That will bring him if he's the man I think he is.’”

⁶¹“And it will, too,” remarked Holmes. ⁶²“Very good, Mrs. Merrilow. ⁶³I should like to have a little chat with Dr. Watson. ⁶⁴That will carry us till lunch-time. ⁶⁵About three o'clock you may expect to see us at your house in Brixton.”

⁶⁶Our visitor had no sooner waddled out of the room—no other verb can describe Mrs. Merrilow's method of progression—than Sherlock Holmes threw himself with fierce energy upon the pile of commonplace books in the corner. ⁶⁷For a few minutes there was a constant swish of the leaves, and then with a grunt of satisfaction he came upon what he sought. ⁶⁸So excited was he that he did not rise, but sat upon the floor like some strange Buddha, with crossed legs, the huge books all round him, and one open upon his knees.

⁶⁹“The case worried me at the time, Watson. ⁷⁰Here are my marginal notes to prove it. ⁷¹I confess that I could make nothing of it. ⁷²And yet I was convinced that the coroner was wrong. ⁷³Have you no recollection of the Abbas Parva tragedy?”

⁷⁴“None, Holmes.”

⁷⁵“And yet you were with me then. ⁷⁶But certainly my own impression was very superficial. ⁷⁷For there was nothing to go by, and none of the parties had engaged my services. ⁷⁸Perhaps you would care to read the papers?”

⁷⁹“Could you not give me the points?”

⁸⁰“That is very easily done. ⁸¹It will probably come back to your memory as I talk. ⁸²Ronder, of course, was a household word. ⁸³He was the rival of Wombwell, and of Sanger, one of the greatest showmen of his day. ⁸⁴There is evidence, however, that he took to drink, and that both he and his show were on the down grade at the time of the great tragedy. ⁸⁵The caravan had halted for the night at Abbas Parva, which is a small village in Berkshire, when this horror occurred. ⁸⁶They were on their way to Wimbledon, travelling by road, and they were simply camping and not exhibiting, as the place is so small a one that it would not have paid them to open.

⁸⁷“They had among their exhibits a very fine North African lion. ⁸⁸Sahara King was its name, and it was the habit, both of Ronder and his wife, to give exhibitions inside its cage. ⁸⁹Here, you see, is a photograph of the performance by which you will perceive that Ronder was a huge porcine person and that his wife was a very magnificent woman. ⁹⁰It was deposed at the inquest that there had been some signs that the lion was dangerous, but, as usual, familiarity begat contempt, and no notice was taken of the fact.

⁹¹“It was usual for either Ronder or his wife to feed the lion at night. ⁹²Sometimes one went, sometimes both, but they never allowed anyone else to do it, for they believed that so long as they were the food-carriers he would regard them as benefactors and would never molest them. ⁹³On this particular night, seven years ago, they both went, and a very terrible happening followed, the details of which have never been made clear.

⁹⁴“It seems that the whole camp was roused near midnight by the roars of the animal and the screams of the woman. ⁹⁵The different grooms and employees rushed from their tents, carrying lanterns, and by their light an awful sight was revealed. ⁹⁶Ronder lay, with the back of his head crushed in and deep claw-marks across his scalp, some ten yards from the cage, which was open. ⁹⁷Close to the door of the cage lay Mrs. Ronder upon her back, with the creature squatting and snarling above her. ⁹⁸It had torn her face in such a fashion that it was never thought that she could live. ⁹⁹Several of the circus men, headed by Leonardo, the strong man, and Griggs, the clown, drove the creature off with poles, upon which it sprang back into the cage and was at once locked in. ¹⁰⁰How it had got loose was a mystery. ¹⁰¹It was conjectured that the pair intended to enter the cage, but that when the door was loosed the creature bounded out upon them. ¹⁰²There was no other point of interest in the evidence save that the woman in a delirium of agony kept screaming, ‘Coward! ¹⁰³Coward!’ as she was carried back to the van in which they lived. ¹⁰⁴It was six months before she was fit to give evidence, but the inquest was duly held, with the obvious verdict of death from misadventure.”

¹⁰⁵“What alternative could be conceived?” said I.

¹⁰⁶“You may well say so. ¹⁰⁷And yet there were one or two points which worried young Edmunds, of the Berkshire Constabulary. ¹⁰⁸A smart lad that! ¹⁰⁹He was sent later to Allahabad. ¹¹⁰That was how I came into the matter, for he dropped in and smoked a pipe or two over it.”

¹¹¹“A thin, yellow-haired man?”

¹¹²“Exactly. ¹¹³I was sure you would pick up the trail presently.”

¹¹⁴“But what worried him?”

¹¹⁵“Well, we were both worried. ¹¹⁶It was so deucedly difficult to reconstruct the affair. ¹¹⁷Look at it from the lion's point of view. ¹¹⁸He is liberated. ¹¹⁹What does he do? ¹²⁰He takes half a dozen bounds

forward, which brings him to Ronder. ¹²¹Ronder turns to fly—the claw-marks were on the back of his head—but the lion strikes him down. ¹²²Then, instead of bounding on and escaping, he returns to the woman, who was close to the cage, and he knocks her over and chews her face up. ¹²³Then, again, those cries of hers would seem to imply that her husband had in some way failed her. ¹²⁴What could the poor devil have done to help her? ¹²⁵You see the difficulty?”

¹²⁶“Quite.”

¹²⁷“And then there was another thing. ¹²⁸It comes back to me now as I think it over. ¹²⁹There was some evidence that just at the time the lion roared and the woman screamed, a man began shouting in terror.”

¹³⁰“This man Ronder, no doubt.”

¹³¹“Well, if his skull was smashed in you would hardly expect to hear from him again. ¹³¹There were at least two witnesses who spoke of the cries of a man being mingled with those of a woman.”

¹³²“I should think the whole camp was crying out by then. ¹³³As to the other points, I think I could suggest a solution.”

¹³⁴“I should be glad to consider it.”

¹³⁵“The two were together, ten yards from the cage, when the lion got loose. ¹³⁶The man turned and was struck down. ¹³⁷The woman conceived the idea of getting into the cage and shutting the door. ¹³⁸It was her only refuge. ¹³⁹She made for it, and just as she reached it the beast bounded after her and knocked her over. ¹⁴⁰She was angry with her husband for having encouraged the beast's rage by turning. ¹⁴¹If they had faced it they might have cowed it. ¹⁴²Hence her cries of ‘Coward!’”

¹⁴³“Brilliant, Watson! ¹⁴⁴Only one flaw in your diamond.”

¹⁴⁵“What is the flaw, Holmes?”

¹⁴⁶“If they were both ten paces from the cage, how came the beast to get loose?”

¹⁴⁷“Is it possible that they had some enemy who loosed it?”

¹⁴⁸“And why should it attack them savagely when it was in the habit of playing with them, and doing tricks with them inside the cage?”

¹⁴⁹“Possibly the same enemy had done something to enrage it.”

¹⁵⁰Holmes looked thoughtful and remained in silence for some moments.

¹⁵¹“Well, Watson, there is this to be said for your theory. ¹⁵²Ronder was a man of many enemies. ¹⁵³Edmunds told me that in his cups he was horrible. ¹⁵⁴A huge bully of a man, he cursed and slashed at everyone who came in his way. ¹⁵⁵I expect those cries about a monster, of which our visitor has spoken, were nocturnal reminiscences of the dear departed. ¹⁵⁶However, our speculations are futile until we have all the facts. ¹⁵⁷There is a cold partridge on the sideboard, Watson, and a bottle of Montrachet. ¹⁵⁸Let us renew our energies before we make a fresh call upon them.”

¹⁵⁹When our hansom deposited us at the house of Mrs. Merrilow, we found that plump lady blocking up the open door of her humble but retired abode. ¹⁶⁰It was very clear that her chief preoccupation was lest she should lose a valuable lodger, and she implored us, before showing us up, to say and do nothing which could lead to so undesirable an end. ¹⁶¹Then, having reassured her, we followed her up the straight, badly carpeted staircase and were shown into the room of the mysterious lodger.

¹⁶²It was a close, musty, ill-ventilated place, as might be expected, since its inmate seldom left it. ¹⁶³From keeping beasts in a cage, the woman seemed, by some retribution of fate, to have become herself a beast in a cage. ¹⁶⁴She sat now in a broken armchair in the shadowy corner of the room. ¹⁶⁵Long years of

inaction had coarsened the lines of her figure, but at some period it must have been beautiful, and was still full and voluptuous. ¹⁶⁶A thick dark veil covered her face, but it was cut off close at her upper lip and disclosed a perfectly shaped mouth and a delicately rounded chin. ¹⁶⁷I could well conceive that she had indeed been a very remarkable woman. ¹⁶⁸Her voice, too, was well modulated and pleasing.

¹⁶⁹“My name is not unfamiliar to you, Mr. Holmes,” said she. ¹⁷⁰“I thought that it would bring you.”

¹⁷¹“That is so, madam, though I do not know how you are aware that I was interested in your case.”

¹⁷²“I learned it when I had recovered my health and was examined by Mr. Edmunds, the county detective. ¹⁷³I fear I lied to him. ¹⁷⁴Perhaps it would have been wiser had I told the truth.”

¹⁷⁵“It is usually wiser to tell the truth. ¹⁷⁶But why did you lie to him?”

¹⁷⁷“Because the fate of someone else depended upon it. ¹⁷⁸I know that he was a very worthless being, and yet I would not have his destruction upon my conscience. ¹⁷⁹We had been so close—so close!”

¹⁸⁰“But has this impediment been removed?”

¹⁸¹“Yes, sir. ¹⁸²The person that I allude to is dead.”

¹⁸³“Then why should you not now tell the police anything you know?”

¹⁸⁴“Because there is another person to be considered. ¹⁸⁵That other person is myself. ¹⁸⁶I could not stand the scandal and publicity which would come from a police examination. ¹⁸⁷I have not long to live, but I wish to die undisturbed. ¹⁸⁸And yet I wanted to find one man of judgment to whom I could tell my terrible story, so that when I am gone all might be understood.”

¹⁸⁹“You compliment me, madam. ¹⁹⁰At the same time, I am a responsible person. ¹⁹¹I do not promise you that when you have spoken I may not myself think it my duty to refer the case to the police.”

¹⁹²“I think not, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁹³I know your character and methods too well, for I have followed your work for some years. ¹⁹⁴Reading is the only pleasure which fate has left me, and I miss little which passes in the world. ¹⁹⁵But in any case, I will take my chance of the use which you may make of my tragedy. ¹⁹⁶It will ease my mind to tell it.”

¹⁹⁷“My friend and I would be glad to hear it.”

¹⁹⁸The woman rose and took from a drawer the photograph of a man. ¹⁹⁹He was clearly a professional acrobat, a man of magnificent physique, taken with his huge arms folded across his swollen chest and a smile breaking from under his heavy moustache—the self-satisfied smile of the man of many conquests.

²⁰⁰“That is Leonardo,” she said.

²⁰¹“Leonardo, the strong man, who gave evidence?”

²⁰²“The same. ²⁰³And this—this is my husband.”

²⁰⁴It was a dreadful face—a human pig, or rather a human wild boar, for it was formidable in its bestiality. ²⁰⁵One could imagine that vile mouth champing and foaming in its rage, and one could conceive those small, vicious eyes darting pure malignancy as they looked forth upon the world. ²⁰⁶Ruffian, bully, beast—it was all written on that heavy-jowled face.

²⁰⁷“Those two pictures will help you, gentlemen, to understand the story. ²⁰⁸I was a poor circus girl brought up on the sawdust, and doing springs through the hoop before I was ten. ²⁰⁹When I became a woman this man loved me, if such lust as his can be called love, and in an evil moment I became his wife. ²¹⁰From that day I was in hell, and he the devil who tormented me. ²¹¹There was no one in the

show who did not know of his treatment. ²¹²He deserted me for others. ²¹³He tied me down and lashed me with his riding-whip when I complained. ²¹⁴They all pitied me and they all loathed him, but what could they do? ²¹⁵They feared him, one and all. ²¹⁶For he was terrible at all times, and murderous when he was drunk. ²¹⁷Again and again he was had up for assault, and for cruelty to the beasts, but he had plenty of money and the fines were nothing to him. ²¹⁸The best men all left us, and the show began to go downhill. ²¹⁹It was only Leonardo and I who kept it up—with little Jimmy Griggs, the clown. ²²⁰Poor devil, he had not much to be funny about, but he did what he could to hold things together.

²²¹“Then Leonardo came more and more into my life. ²²²You see what he was like. ²²³I know now the poor spirit that was hidden in that splendid body, but compared to my husband he seemed like the angel Gabriel. ²²⁴He pitied me and helped me, till at last our intimacy turned to love—deep, deep, passionate love, such love as I had dreamed of but never hoped to feel. ²²⁵My husband suspected it, but I think that he was a coward as well as a bully, and that Leonardo was the one man that he was afraid of. ²²⁶He took revenge in his own way by torturing me more than ever. ²²⁷One night my cries brought Leonardo to the door of our van. ²²⁸We were near tragedy that night, and soon my lover and I understood that it could not be avoided. ²²⁹My husband was not fit to live. ²³⁰We planned that he should die.

²³¹“Leonardo had a clever, scheming brain. ²³²It was he who planned it. ²³³I do not say that to blame him, for I was ready to go with him every inch of the way. ²³⁴But I should never have had the wit to think of such a plan. ²³⁵We made a club—Leonardo made it—and in the leaden head he fastened five long steel nails, the points outward, with just such a spread as the lion's paw. ²³⁶This was to give my husband his death-blow, and yet to leave the evidence that it was the lion which we would loose who had done the deed.

²³⁷“It was a pitch-dark night when my husband and I went down, as was our custom, to feed the beast. ²³⁸We carried with us the raw meat in a zinc pail. ²³⁹Leonardo was waiting at the corner of the big van which we should have to pass before we reached the cage. ²⁴⁰He was too slow, and we walked past him before he could strike, but he followed us on tiptoe and I heard the crash as the club smashed my husband's skull. ²⁴¹My heart leaped with joy at the sound. ²⁴²I sprang forward, and I undid the catch which held the door of the great lion's cage.

²⁴³“And then the terrible thing happened. ²⁴⁴You may have heard how quick these creatures are to scent human blood, and how it excites them. ²⁴⁵Some strange instinct had told the creature in one instant that a human being had been slain. ²⁴⁶As I slipped the bars it bounded out and was on me in an instant. ²⁴⁷Leonardo could have saved me. ²⁴⁸If he had rushed forward and struck the beast with his club he might have cowed it. ²⁴⁹But the man lost his nerve. ²⁵⁰I heard him shout in his terror, and then I saw him turn and fly. ²⁵¹At the same instant the teeth of the lion met in my face. ²⁵²Its hot, filthy breath had already poisoned me and I was hardly conscious of pain. ²⁵³With the palms of my hands I tried to push the great steaming, blood-stained jaws away from me, and I screamed for help. ²⁵⁴I was conscious that the camp was stirring, and then dimly I remembered a group of men. ²⁵⁵Leonardo, Griggs, and others, dragging me from under the creature's paws. ²⁵⁶That was my last memory, Mr. Holmes, for many a weary month. ²⁵⁷When I came to myself and saw myself in the mirror, I cursed that lion—oh, how I cursed him!—not because he had torn away my beauty but because he had not torn away my life. ²⁵⁸I had but one desire, Mr. Holmes, and I had enough money to gratify it. ²⁵⁹It was that I should cover myself so that my poor face should be seen by none, and that I should dwell where none whom I had ever known should find me. ²⁶⁰That was all that was left to me to do—and that is what I have done. ²⁶¹A poor wounded beast that has crawled into its hole to die—that is the end of Eugenia Ronder.”

²⁶²We sat in silence for some time after the unhappy woman had told her story. ²⁶³Then Holmes stretched out his long arm and patted her hand with such a show of sympathy as I had seldom known him to exhibit.

²⁶⁴“Poor girl!” he said. ²⁶⁵“Poor girl! ²⁶⁶The ways of fate are indeed hard to understand. ²⁶⁷If there is not some compensation hereafter, then the world is a cruel jest. ²⁶⁸But what of this man Leonardo?”

²⁶⁹“I never saw him or heard from him again. ²⁷⁰Perhaps I have been wrong to feel so bitterly against him. ²⁷¹He might as soon have loved one of the freaks whom we carried round the country as the thing which the lion had left. ²⁷²But a woman's love is not so easily set aside. ²⁷³He had left me under the beast's claws, he had deserted me in my need, and yet I could not bring myself to give him to the gallows. ²⁷⁴For myself, I cared nothing what became of me. ²⁷⁵What could be more dreadful than my actual life? ²⁷⁶But I stood between Leonardo and his fate.”

²⁷⁷“And he is dead?”

²⁷⁸“He was drowned last month when bathing near Margate. ²⁷⁹I saw his death in the paper.”

²⁸⁰“And what did he do with this five-clawed club, which is the most singular and ingenious part of all your story?”

²⁸¹“I cannot tell, Mr. Holmes. ²⁸²There is a chalk-pit by the camp, with a deep green pool at the base of it. ²⁸³Perhaps in the depths of that pool—”

²⁸⁴“Well, well, it is of little consequence now. ²⁸⁵The case is closed.”

²⁸⁶“Yes,” said the woman, “the case is closed.”

²⁸⁷We had risen to go, but there was something in the woman's voice which arrested Holmes's attention.

²⁸⁸He turned swiftly upon her.

²⁸⁹“Your life is not your own,” he said. ²⁹⁰“Keep your hands off it.”

²⁹¹“What use is it to anyone?”

²⁹²“How can you tell? ²⁹³The example of patient suffering is in itself the most precious of all lessons to an impatient world.”

²⁹⁴The woman's answer was a terrible one. ²⁹⁵She raised her veil and stepped forward into the light.

²⁹⁶“I wonder if you would bear it,” she said.

²⁹⁷It was horrible. ²⁹⁸No words can describe the framework of a face when the face itself is gone. ²⁹⁹Two living and beautiful brown eyes looking sadly out from that grisly ruin did but make the view more awful. ³⁰⁰Holmes held up his hand in a gesture of pity and protest, and together we left the room.

³⁰¹Two days later, when I called upon my friend, he pointed with some pride to a small blue bottle upon his mantelpiece. ³⁰²I picked it up. ³⁰³There was a red poison label. ³⁰⁴A pleasant almondy odour rose when I opened it.

³⁰⁵“Prussic acid?” said I.

³⁰⁶“Exactly. ³⁰⁷It came by post. ³⁰⁸I send you my temptation. ³⁰⁹I will follow your advice.’ ³¹⁰That was the message. ³¹¹I think, Watson, we can guess the name of the brave woman who sent it.”

The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

¹Sherlock Holmes had been bending for a long time over a low-power microscope. ²Now he straightened himself up and looked round at me in triumph.

³“It is glue, Watson,” said he. ⁴“Unquestionably it is glue. ⁵Have a look at these scattered objects in the field!”

⁶I stooped to the eyepiece and focussed for my vision.

⁷“Those hairs are threads from a tweed coat. ⁸The irregular gray masses are dust. ⁹There are epithelial scales on the left. ¹⁰Those brown blobs in the centre are undoubtedly glue.”

¹¹“Well,” I said, laughing, “I am prepared to take your word for it. ¹²Does anything depend upon it?”

¹³“It is a very fine demonstration,” he answered. ¹⁴“In the St. Pancras case you may remember that a cap was found beside the dead policeman. ¹⁵The accused man denies that it is his. ¹⁶But he is a picture-frame maker who habitually handles glue.”

¹⁷“Is it one of your cases?”

¹⁸“No; my friend, Merivale, of the Yard, asked me to look into the case. ¹⁹Since I ran down that coiner by the zinc and copper filings in the seam of his cuff they have begun to realize the importance of the microscope.” ²⁰He looked impatiently at his watch. ²¹“I had a new client calling, but he is overdue. ²²By the way, Watson, you know something of racing?”

²³“I ought to. ²⁴I pay for it with about half my wound pension.”

²⁵“Then I'll make you my ‘Handy Guide to the Turf.’ ²⁶What about Sir Robert Norberton? ²⁷Does the name recall anything?”

²⁸“Well, I should say so. ²⁹He lives at Shoscombe Old Place, and I know it well, for my summer quarters were down there once. ³⁰Norberton nearly came within your province once.”

³¹“How was that?”

³²“It was when he horsewhipped Sam Brewer, the well-known Curzon Street money-lender, on Newmarket Heath. ³³He nearly killed the man.”

³⁴“Ah, he sounds interesting! ³⁵Does he often indulge in that way?”

³⁶“Well, he has the name of being a dangerous man. ³⁷He is about the most daredevil rider in England—second in the Grand National a few years back. ³⁸He is one of those men who have overshot their true generation. ³⁹He should have been a buck in the days of the Regency—a boxer, an athlete, a plunger on the turf, a lover of fair ladies, and, by all account, so far down Queer Street that he may never find his way back again.”

⁴⁰“Capital, Watson! ⁴¹A thumb-nail sketch. ⁴²I seem to know the man. ⁴³Now, can you give me some idea of Shoscombe Old Place?”

⁴⁴“Only that it is in the centre of Shoscombe Park, and that the famous Shoscombe stud and training quarters are to be found there.”

⁴⁵“And the head trainer,” said Holmes, “is John Mason. ⁴⁶You need not look surprised at my knowledge, Watson, for this is a letter from him which I am unfolding. ⁴⁷But let us have some more about Shoscombe. ⁴⁸I seem to have struck a rich vein.”

⁴⁹“There are the Shoscombe spaniels,” said I. ⁵⁰“You hear of them at every dog show. ⁵¹The most exclusive breed in England. ⁵²They are the special pride of the lady of Shoscombe Old Place.”

⁵³“Sir Robert Norberton's wife, I presume!”

⁵⁴“Sir Robert has never married. ⁵⁵Just as well, I think, considering his prospects. ⁵⁶He lives with his widowed sister, Lady Beatrice Falder.”

⁵⁷“You mean that she lives with him?”

⁵⁸“No, no. ⁵⁹The place belonged to her late husband, Sir James. ⁶⁰Norberton has no claim on it at all. ⁶¹It is only a life interest and reverts to her husband's brother. ⁶²Meantime, she draws the rents every year.”

⁶³“And brother Robert, I suppose, spends the said rents?”

⁶⁴“That is about the size of it. ⁶⁵He is a devil of a fellow and must lead her a most uneasy life. ⁶⁶Yet I have heard that she is devoted to him. ⁶⁷But what is amiss at Shoscombe?”

⁶⁸“Ah, that is just what I want to know. ⁶⁹And here, I expect, is the man who can tell us.”

⁷⁰The door had opened and the page had shown in a tall, clean-shaven man with the firm, austere expression which is only seen upon those who have to control horses or boys. ⁷¹Mr. John Mason had many of both under his sway, and he looked equal to the task. ⁷²He bowed with cold self-possession and seated himself upon the chair to which Holmes had waved him.

⁷³“You had my note, Mr. Holmes?”

⁷⁴“Yes, but it explained nothing.”

⁷⁵“It was too delicate a thing for me to put the details on paper. ⁷⁶And too complicated. ⁷⁷It was only face to face I could do it.”

⁷⁸“Well, we are at your disposal.”

⁷⁹“First of all, Mr. Holmes, I think that my employer, Sir Robert, has gone mad.”

⁸⁰Holmes raised his eyebrows. ⁸¹“This is Baker Street, not Harley Street,” said he. ⁸²“But why do you say so?”

⁸³“Well, sir, when a man does one queer thing, or two queer things, there may be a meaning to it, but when everything he does is queer, then you begin to wonder. ⁸⁴I believe Shoscombe Prince and the Derby have turned his brain.”

⁸⁵“That is a colt you are running?”

⁸⁶“The best in England, Mr. Holmes. ⁸⁷I should know, if anyone does. ⁸⁸Now, I'll be plain with you, for I know you are gentlemen of honour and that it won't go beyond the room. ⁸⁹Sir Robert has got to win this Derby. ⁹⁰He's up to the neck, and it's his last chance. ⁹¹Everything he could raise or borrow is on the horse—and at fine odds, too! ⁹²You can get forties now, but it was nearer the hundred when he began to back him.”

⁹³“But how is that if the horse is so good?”

⁹⁴“The public don't know how good he is. ⁹⁵Sir Robert has been too clever for the touts. ⁹⁶He has the Prince's half-brother out for spins. ⁹⁷You can't tell 'em apart. ⁹⁸But there are two lengths in a furlong between them when it comes to a gallop. ⁹⁹He thinks of nothing but the horse and the race. ¹⁰⁰His whole life is on it. ¹⁰¹He's holding off the Jews till then. ¹⁰²If the Prince fails him he is done.”

¹⁰³“It seems a rather desperate gamble, but where does the madness come in?”

¹⁰⁴“Well, first of all, you have only to look at him. ¹⁰⁵I don't believe he sleeps at night. ¹⁰⁶He is down at the stables at all hours. ¹⁰⁷His eyes are wild. ¹⁰⁸It has all been too much for his nerves. ¹⁰⁹Then there is his conduct to Lady Beatrice!”

¹¹⁰“Ah! ¹¹¹What is that?”

¹¹²“They have always been the best of friends. ¹¹³They had the same tastes, the two of them, and she loved the horses as much as he did. ¹¹⁴Every day at the same hour she would drive down to see them—and, above all, she loved the Prince. ¹¹⁵He would prick up his ears when he heard the wheels on the gravel, and he would trot out each morning to the carriage to get his lump of sugar. ¹¹⁶But that's all over now.”

¹¹⁷“Why?”

¹¹⁸“Well, she seems to have lost all interest in the horses. ¹¹⁹For a week now she has driven past the stables with never so much as ‘Good-morning’!”

¹²⁰“You think there has been a quarrel?”

¹²¹“And a bitter, savage, spiteful quarrel at that. ¹²²Why else would he give away her pet spaniel that she loved as if he were her child? ¹²³He gave it a few days ago to old Barnes, what keeps the Green Dragon, three miles off, at Crendall.”

¹²⁴“That certainly did seem strange.”

¹²⁵“Of course, with her weak heart and dropsy one couldn't expect that she could get about with him, but he spent two hours every evening in her room. ¹²⁶He might well do what he could, for she has been a rare good friend to him. ¹²⁷But that's all over, too. ¹²⁸He never goes near her. ¹²⁹And she takes it to heart. ¹³⁰She is brooding and sulky and drinking, Mr. Holmes—drinking like a fish.”

¹³¹“Did she drink before this estrangement?”

¹³²“Well, she took her glass, but now it is often a whole bottle of an evening. ¹³³So Stephens, the butler, told me. ¹³⁴It's all changed, Mr. Holmes, and there is something damned rotten about it. ¹³⁵But then, again, what is master doing down at the old church crypt at night? ¹³⁶And who is the man that meets him there?”

¹³⁷Holmes rubbed his hands.

¹³⁸“Go on, Mr. Mason. ¹³⁹You get more and more interesting.”

¹⁴⁰“It was the butler who saw him go. ¹⁴¹Twelve o'clock at night and raining hard. ¹⁴²So next night I was up at the house and, sure enough, master was off again. ¹⁴³Stephens and I went after him, but it was jumpy work, for it would have been a bad job if he had seen us. ¹⁴⁴He's a terrible man with his fists if he gets started, and no respecter of persons. ¹⁴⁵So we were shy of getting too near, but we marked him down all right. ¹⁴⁶It was the haunted crypt that he was making for, and there was a man waiting for him there.”

¹⁴⁷“What is this haunted crypt?”

¹⁴⁸“Well, sir, there is an old ruined chapel in the park. ¹⁴⁹It is so old that nobody could fix its date. ¹⁵⁰And under it there's a crypt which has a bad name among us. ¹⁵¹It's a dark, damp, lonely place by day, but there are few in that county that would have the nerve to go near it at night. ¹⁵²But master's not afraid. ¹⁵³He never feared anything in his life. ¹⁵⁴But what is he doing there in the night-time?”

¹⁵⁵“Wait a bit!” said Holmes. ¹⁵⁶“You say there is another man there. ¹⁵⁷It must be one of your own stablemen, or someone from the house! ¹⁵⁸Surely you have only to spot who it is and question him?”

¹⁵⁹“It's no one I know.”

¹⁶⁰“How can you say that?”

¹⁶¹“Because I have seen him, Mr. Holmes. ¹⁶²It was on that second night. ¹⁶³Sir Robert turned and passed us—me and Stephens, quaking in the bushes like two bunny-rabbits, for there was a bit of moon that night. ¹⁶⁴But we could hear the other moving about behind. ¹⁶⁵We were not afraid of him. ¹⁶⁶So we up when Sir Robert was gone and pretended we were just having a walk like in the moonlight, and so we came right on him as casual and innocent as you please. ¹⁶⁷‘Hullo, mate! who may you be?’ says I. ¹⁶⁸I guess he had not heard us coming, so he looked over his shoulder with a face as if he had seen the devil coming out of hell. ¹⁶⁹He let out a yell, and away he went as hard as he could lick it in the darkness. ¹⁷⁰He could run!—I'll give him that. ¹⁷¹In a minute he was out of sight and hearing, and who he was, or what he was, we never found.”

¹⁷²“But you saw him clearly in the moonlight?”

¹⁷³“Yes, I would swear to his yellow face—a mean dog, I should say. ¹⁷⁴What could he have in common with Sir Robert?”

¹⁷⁵Holmes sat for some time lost in thought.

¹⁷⁶“Who keeps Lady Beatrice Falder company?” he asked at last.

¹⁷⁷“There is her maid, Carrie Evans. ¹⁷⁸She has been with her this five years.”

¹⁷⁹“And is, no doubt, devoted?”

¹⁸⁰Mr. Mason shuffled uncomfortably.

¹⁸¹“She's devoted enough,” he answered at last. ¹⁸²“But I won't say to whom.”

¹⁸³“Ah!” said Holmes.

¹⁸⁴“I can't tell tales out of school.”

¹⁸⁵“I quite understand, Mr. Mason. ¹⁸⁶Of course, the situation is clear enough. ¹⁸⁷From Dr. Watson's description of Sir Robert I can realize that no woman is safe from him. ¹⁸⁸Don't you think the quarrel between brother and sister may lie there?”

¹⁸⁹“Well, the scandal has been pretty clear for a long time.”

¹⁹⁰“But she may not have seen it before. ¹⁹¹Let us suppose that she has suddenly found it out. ¹⁹²She wants to get rid of the woman. ¹⁹³Her brother will not permit it. ¹⁹⁴The invalid, with her weak heart and inability to get about, has no means of enforcing her will. ¹⁹⁵The hated maid is still tied to her. ¹⁹⁶The lady refuses to speak, sulks, takes to drink. ¹⁹⁷Sir Robert in his anger takes her pet spaniel away from her. ¹⁹⁸Does not all this hang together?”

¹⁹⁹“Well, it might do—so far as it goes.”

²⁰⁰“Exactly! ²⁰¹As far as it goes. ²⁰²How would all that bear upon the visits by night to the old crypt? ²⁰³We can't fit that into our plot.”

²⁰⁴“No, sir, and there is something more that I can't fit in. ²⁰⁵Why should Sir Robert want to dig up a dead body?”

²⁰⁶Holmes sat up abruptly.

²⁰⁷“We only found it out yesterday—after I had written to you. ²⁰⁸Yesterday Sir Robert had gone to London, so Stephens and I went down to the crypt. ²⁰⁹It was all in order, sir, except that in one corner was a bit of a human body.”

²¹⁰“You informed the police, I suppose?”

²¹¹Our visitor smiled grimly.

²¹²“Well, sir, I think it would hardly interest them. ²¹³It was just the head and a few bones of a mummy.

²¹⁴It may have been a thousand years old. ²¹⁵But it wasn't there before. ²¹⁶That I'll swear, and so will Stephens. ²¹⁷It had been stowed away in a corner and covered over with a board, but that corner had always been empty before.”

²¹⁸“What did you do with it?”

²¹⁹“Well, we just left it there.”

²²⁰“That was wise. ²²¹You say Sir Robert was away yesterday. ²²²Has he returned?”

²²³“We expect him back to-day.”

²²⁴“When did Sir Robert give away his sister's dog?”

²²⁵“It was just a week ago to-day. ²²⁶The creature was howling outside the old well-house, and Sir Robert was in one of his tantrums that morning. ²²⁷He caught it up, and I thought he would have killed it. ²²⁸Then he gave it to Sandy Bain, the jockey, and told him to take the dog to old Barnes at the Green Dragon, for he never wished to see it again.”

²²⁹Holmes sat for some time in silent thought. ²³⁰He had lit the oldest and foulest of his pipes.

²³¹“I am not clear yet what you want me to do in this matter, Mr. Mason,” he said at last. ²³²“Can't you make it more definite?”

²³³“Perhaps this will make it more definite, Mr. Holmes,” said our visitor.

²³⁴He took a paper from his pocket, and, unwrapping it carefully, he exposed a charred fragment of bone.

²³⁵Holmes examined it with interest.

²³⁶“Where did you get it?”

²³⁷“There is a central heating furnace in the cellar under Lady Beatrice's room. ²³⁸It's been off for some time, but Sir Robert complained of cold and had it on again. ²³⁹Harvey runs it—he's one of my lads. ²⁴⁰This very morning he came to me with this which he found raking out the cinders. ²⁴¹He didn't like the look of it.”

²⁴²“Nor do I,” said Holmes. ²⁴³“What do you make of it, Watson?”

²⁴⁴It was burned to a black cinder, but there could be no question as to its anatomical significance.

²⁴⁵“It's the upper condyle of a human femur,” said I.

²⁴⁶“Exactly!” ²⁴⁷Holmes had become very serious. ²⁴⁸“When does this lad tend to the furnace?”

²⁴⁹“He makes it up every evening and then leaves it.”

²⁵⁰“Then anyone could visit it during the night?”

²⁵¹“Yes, sir.”

²⁵²“Can you enter it from outside?”

²⁵³“There is one door from outside. ²⁵⁴There is another which leads up by a stair to the passage in which Lady Beatrice's room is situated.”

²⁵⁵“These are deep waters, Mr. Mason; deep and rather dirty. ²⁵⁶You say that Sir Robert was not at home last night?”

²⁵⁷“No, sir.”

²⁵⁸“Then, whoever was burning bones, it was not he.”

²⁵⁹“That's true, sir.”

²⁶⁰“What is the name of that inn you spoke of?”

²⁶¹“The Green Dragon.”

²⁶²“Is there good fishing in that part of Berkshire?” ²⁶³The honest trainer showed very clearly upon his face that he was convinced that yet another lunatic had come into his harassed life.

²⁶⁴“Well, sir, I've heard there are trout in the mill-stream and pike in the Hall lake.”

²⁶⁵“That's good enough. ²⁶⁶Watson and I are famous fishermen—are we not, Watson? ²⁶⁷You may address us in future at the Green Dragon. ²⁶⁸We should reach it to-night. ²⁶⁹I need not say that we don't want to see you, Mr. Mason, but a note will reach us, and no doubt I could find you if I want you. ²⁷⁰When we have gone a little farther into the matter I will let you have a considered opinion.”

²⁷¹Thus it was that on a bright May evening Holmes and I found ourselves alone in a first-class carriage and bound for the little “halt-on-demand” station of Shoscombe. ²⁷²The rack above us was covered with a formidable litter of rods, reels, and baskets. ²⁷³On reaching our destination a short drive took us to an old-fashioned tavern, where a sporting host, Josiah Barnes, entered eagerly into our plans for the extirpation of the fish of the neighbourhood.

²⁷⁴“What about the Hall lake and the chance of a pike?” said Holmes.

²⁷⁵The face of the innkeeper clouded.

²⁷⁶“That wouldn't do, sir. ²⁷⁷You might chance to find yourself in the lake before you were through.”

²⁷⁸“How's that, then?”

²⁷⁹“It's Sir Robert, sir. ²⁸⁰He's terrible jealous of touts. ²⁸¹If you two strangers were as near his training quarters as that he'd be after you as sure as fate. ²⁸²He ain't taking no chances, Sir Robert ain't.”

²⁸³“I've heard he has a horse entered for the Derby.”

²⁸⁴“Yes, and a good colt, too. ²⁸⁵He carries all our money for the race, and all Sir Robert's into the bargain. ²⁸⁶By the way”—he looked at us with thoughtful eyes—“I suppose you ain't on the turf yourselves?”

²⁸⁷“No, indeed. ²⁸⁸Just two weary Londoners who badly need some good Berkshire air.”

²⁸⁹“Well, you are in the right place for that. ²⁹⁰There is a deal of it lying about. ²⁹¹But mind what I have told you about Sir Robert. ²⁹²He's the sort that strikes first and speaks afterwards. ²⁹³Keep clear of the park.”

²⁹⁴“Surely, Mr. Barnes! ²⁹⁵We certainly shall. ²⁹⁶By the way, that was a most beautiful spaniel that was whining in the hall.”

²⁹⁷“I should say it was. ²⁹⁸That was the real Shoscombe breed. ²⁹⁹There ain't a better in England.”

³⁰⁰“I am a dog-fancier myself,” said Holmes. ³⁰¹“Now, if it is a fair question, what would a prize dog like that cost?”

³⁰²“More than I could pay, sir. ³⁰³It was Sir Robert himself who gave me this one. ³⁰⁴That's why I have to keep it on a lead. ³⁰⁵It would be off to the Hall in a jiffy if I gave it its head.”

³⁰⁶“We are getting some cards in our hand, Watson,” said Holmes when the landlord had left us. ³⁰⁷“It's not an easy one to play, but we may see our way in a day or two. ³⁰⁸By the way, Sir Robert is still in London, I hear. ³⁰⁹We might, perhaps, enter the sacred domain to-night without fear of bodily assault. ³¹⁰There are one or two points on which I should like reassurance.”

³¹¹“Have you any theory, Holmes?”

³¹²“Only this, Watson, that something happened a week or so ago which has cut deep into the life of the Shoscombe household. ³¹³What is that something? ³¹⁴We can only guess at it from its effects. ³¹⁵They seem to be of a curiously mixed character. ³¹⁶But that should surely help us. ³¹⁷It is only the colourless, uneventful case which is hopeless.

³¹⁸“Let us consider our data. ³¹⁹The brother no longer visits the beloved invalid sister. ³²⁰He gives away her favourite dog. ³²¹Her dog, Watson! ³²²Does that suggest nothing to you?”

³²³“Nothing but the brother's spite.”

³²⁴“Well, it might be so. ³²⁵Or—well, there is an alternative. ³²⁶Now to continue our review of the situation from the time that the quarrel, if there is a quarrel, began. ³²⁷The lady keeps her room, alters her habits, is not seen save when she drives out with her maid, refuses to stop at the stables to greet her favourite horse, and apparently takes to drink. ³²⁸That covers the case, does it not?”

³²⁹“Save for the business in the crypt.”

³³⁰“That is another line of thought. ³³¹There are two, and I beg you will not tangle them. ³³²Line A, which concerns Lady Beatrice, has a vaguely sinister flavour, has it not?”

³³³“I can make nothing of it.”

³³⁴“Well, now, let us take up line B, which concerns Sir Robert. ³³⁵He is mad keen upon winning the Derby. ³³⁶He is in the hands of the Jews, and may at any moment be sold up and his racing stables seized by his creditors. ³³⁷He is a daring and desperate man. ³³⁸He derives his income from his sister. ³³⁹His sister's maid is his willing tool. ³⁴⁰So far we seem to be on fairly safe ground, do we not?”

³⁴¹“But the crypt?”

³⁴²“Ah, yes, the crypt! ³⁴³Let us suppose, Watson—it is merely a scandalous supposition, a hypothesis put forward for argument's sake—that Sir Robert has done away with his sister.”

³⁴⁴“My dear Holmes, it is out of the question.”

³⁴⁵“Very possibly, Watson. ³⁴⁶Sir Robert is a man of an honourable stock. ³⁴⁷But you do occasionally find a carrion crow among the eagles. ³⁴⁸Let us for a moment argue upon this supposition. ³⁴⁹He could not fly the country until he had realized his fortune, and that fortune could only be realized by bringing off this coup with Shoscombe Prince. ³⁵⁰Therefore, he has still to stand his ground. ³⁵¹To do this he would have to dispose of the body of his victim, and he would also have to find a substitute who would impersonate her. ³⁵²With the maid as his confidante that would not be impossible. ³⁵³The woman's body might be conveyed to the crypt, which is a place so seldom visited, and it might be secretly destroyed

at night in the furnace, leaving behind it such evidence as we have already seen. ³⁵⁴What say you to that, Watson?"

³⁵⁵"Well, it is all possible if you grant the original monstrous supposition."

³⁵⁶"I think that there is a small experiment which we may try to-morrow, Watson, in order to throw some light on the matter. ³⁵⁷Meanwhile, if we mean to keep up our characters, I suggest that we have our host in for a glass of his own wine and hold some high converse upon eels and dace, which seems to be the straight road to his affections. ³⁵⁸We may chance to come upon some useful local gossip in the process."

³⁵⁹In the morning Holmes discovered that we had come without our spoon-bait for jack, which absolved us from fishing for the day. ³⁶⁰About eleven o'clock we started for a walk, and he obtained leave to take the black spaniel with us.

³⁶¹"This is the place," said he as we came to two high park gates with heraldic griffins towering above them. ³⁶²"About midday, Mr. Barnes informs me, the old lady takes a drive, and the carriage must slow down while the gates are opened. ³⁶³When it comes through, and before it gathers speed, I want you, Watson, to stop the coachman with some question. ³⁶⁴Never mind me. ³⁶⁵I shall stand behind this holly-bush and see what I can see."

³⁶⁶It was not a long vigil. ³⁶⁷Within a quarter of an hour we saw the big open yellow barouche coming down the long avenue, with two splendid, high-stepping gray carriage horses in the shafts. ³⁶⁸Holmes crouched behind his bush with the dog. ³⁶⁹I stood unconcernedly swinging a cane in the roadway. ³⁷⁰A keeper ran out and the gates swung open.

³⁷¹The carriage had slowed to a walk, and I was able to get a good look at the occupants. ³⁷²A highly coloured young woman with flaxen hair and impudent eyes sat on the left. ³⁷³At her right was an elderly person with rounded back and a huddle of shawls about her face and shoulders which proclaimed the invalid. ³⁷⁴When the horses reached the highroad I held up my hand with an authoritative gesture, and as the coachman pulled up I inquired if Sir Robert was at Shoscombe Old Place.

³⁷⁵At the same moment Holmes stepped out and released the spaniel. ³⁷⁶With a joyous cry it dashed forward to the carriage and sprang upon the step. ³⁷⁷Then in a moment its eager greeting changed to furious rage, and it snapped at the black skirt above it.

³⁷⁸"Drive on! ³⁷⁹Drive on!" shrieked a harsh voice. ³⁸⁰The coachman lashed the horses, and we were left standing in the roadway.

³⁸¹"Well, Watson, that's done it," said Holmes as he fastened the lead to the neck of the excited spaniel.

³⁸²"He thought it was his mistress, and he found it was a stranger. ³⁸³Dogs don't make mistakes."

³⁸⁴"But it was the voice of a man!" I cried.

³⁸⁵"Exactly! ³⁸⁶We have added one card to our hand, Watson, but it needs careful playing, all the same."

³⁸⁷My companion seemed to have no further plans for the day, and we did actually use our fishing tackle in the mill-stream, with the result that we had a dish of trout for our supper. ³⁸⁸It was only after that meal that Holmes showed signs of renewed activity. ³⁸⁹Once more we found ourselves upon the same road as in the morning, which led us to the park gates. ³⁹⁰A tall, dark figure was awaiting us there, who proved to be our London acquaintance, Mr. John Mason, the trainer.

³⁹¹"Good-evening, gentlemen," said he. ³⁹²"I got your note, Mr. Holmes. ³⁹³Sir Robert has not returned yet, but I hear that he is expected to-night."

³⁹⁴"How far is this crypt from the house?" asked Holmes.

³⁹⁵“A good quarter of a mile.”

³⁹⁶“Then I think we can disregard him altogether.”

³⁹⁷“I can't afford to do that, Mr. Holmes. ³⁹⁸The moment he arrives he will want to see me to get the last news of Shoscombe Prince.”

³⁹⁹“I see! ⁴⁰⁰In that case we must work without you, Mr. Mason. ⁴⁰¹You can show us the crypt and then leave us.”

⁴⁰²It was pitch-dark and without a moon, but Mason led us over the grass-lands until a dark mass loomed up in front of us which proved to be the ancient chapel. ⁴⁰³We entered the broken gap which was once the porch, and our guide, stumbling among heaps of loose masonry, picked his way to the corner of the building, where a steep stair led down into the crypt. ⁴⁰⁴Striking a match, he illuminated the melancholy place—dismal and evil-smelling, with ancient crumbling walls of rough-hewn stone, and piles of coffins, some of lead and some of stone, extending upon one side right up to the arched and groined roof which lost itself in the shadows above our heads. ⁴⁰⁵Holmes had lit his lantern, which shot a tiny tunnel of vivid yellow light upon the mournful scene. ⁴⁰⁶Its rays were reflected back from the coffin-plates, many of them adorned with the griffin and coronet of this old family which carried its honours even to the gate of Death.

⁴⁰⁷“You spoke of some bones, Mr. Mason. ⁴⁰⁸Could you show them before you go?”

⁴⁰⁹“They are here in this corner.” ⁴¹⁰The trainer strode across and then stood in silent surprise as our light was turned upon the place. ⁴¹¹“They are gone,” said he.

⁴¹²“So I expected,” said Holmes, chuckling. ⁴¹³“I fancy the ashes of them might even now be found in that oven which had already consumed a part.”

⁴¹⁴“But why in the world would anyone want to burn the bones of a man who has been dead a thousand years?” asked John Mason.

⁴¹⁵“That is what we are here to find out,” said Holmes. ⁴¹⁶“It may mean a long search, and we need not detain you. ⁴¹⁷I fancy that we shall get our solution before morning.”

⁴¹⁸When John Mason had left us, Holmes set to work making a very careful examination of the graves, ranging from a very ancient one, which appeared to be Saxon, in the centre, through a long line of Norman Hugos and Odos, until we reached the Sir William and Sir Denis Falder of the eighteenth century. ⁴¹⁹It was an hour or more before Holmes came to a leaden coffin standing on end before the entrance to the vault. ⁴²⁰I heard his little cry of satisfaction and was aware from his hurried but purposeful movements that he had reached a goal. ⁴²¹With his lens he was eagerly examining the edges of the heavy lid. ⁴²²Then he drew from his pocket a short jemmy, a box-opener, which he thrust into a chink, levering back the whole front, which seemed to be secured by only a couple of clamps. ⁴²³There was a rending, tearing sound as it gave way, but it had hardly hinged back and partly revealed the contents before we had an unforeseen interruption.

⁴²⁴Someone was walking in the chapel above. ⁴²⁵It was the firm, rapid step of one who came with a definite purpose and knew well the ground upon which he walked. ⁴²⁶A light streamed down the stairs, and an instant later the man who bore it was framed in the Gothic archway. ⁴²⁷He was a terrible figure, huge in stature and fierce in manner. ⁴²⁸A large stable-lantern which he held in front of him shone upward upon a strong, heavily moustached face and angry eyes, which glared round him into every recess of the vault, finally fixing themselves with a deadly stare upon my companion and myself.

⁴²⁹“Who the devil are you?” he thundered. ⁴³⁰“And what are you doing upon my property?” ⁴³¹Then, as Holmes returned no answer, he took a couple of steps forward and raised a heavy stick which he carried.

⁴³²“Do you hear me?” he cried. ⁴³³“Who are you? ⁴³⁴What are you doing here?” ⁴³⁵His cudgel quivered in the air.

⁴³⁶But instead of shrinking Holmes advanced to meet him.

⁴³⁷“I also have a question to ask you, Sir Robert,” he said in his sternest tone. ⁴³⁸“Who is this? ⁴³⁹And what is it doing here?”

⁴⁴⁰He turned and tore open the coffin-lid behind him. ⁴⁴¹In the glare of the lantern I saw a body swathed in a sheet from head to foot, with dreadful, witch-like features, all nose and chin, projecting at one end, the dim, glazed eyes staring from a discoloured and crumbling face.

⁴⁴²The baronet had staggered back with a cry and supported himself against a stone sarcophagus.

⁴⁴³“How came you to know of this?” he cried. ⁴⁴⁴And then, with some return of his truculent manner: “What business is it of yours?”

⁴⁴⁵“My name is Sherlock Holmes,” said my companion. ⁴⁴⁶“Possibly it is familiar to you. ⁴⁴⁷In any case, my business is that of every other good citizen—to uphold the law. ⁴⁴⁸It seems to me that you have much to answer for.”

⁴⁴⁹Sir Robert glared for a moment, but Holmes's quiet voice and cool, assured manner had their effect.

⁴⁵⁰“Fore God, Mr. Holmes, it's all right,” said he. ⁴⁵¹“Appearances are against me, I'll admit, but I could act no otherwise.”

⁴⁵²“I should be happy to think so, but I fear your explanations must be before the police.”

⁴⁵³Sir Robert shrugged his broad shoulders.

⁴⁵⁴“Well, if it must be, it must. ⁴⁵⁵Come up to the house and you can judge for yourself how the matter stands.”

⁴⁵⁶A quarter of an hour later we found ourselves in what I judge, from the lines of polished barrels behind glass covers, to be the gun-room of the old house. ⁴⁵⁷It was comfortably furnished, and here Sir Robert left us for a few moments. ⁴⁵⁸When he returned he had two companions with him; the one, the florid young woman whom we had seen in the carriage; the other, a small rat-faced man with a disagreeably furtive manner. ⁴⁵⁹These two wore an appearance of utter bewilderment, which showed that the baronet had not yet had time to explain to them the turn events had taken.

⁴⁶⁰“There,” said Sir Robert with a wave of his hand, “are Mr. and Mrs. Norlett. ⁴⁶¹Mrs. Norlett, under her maiden name of Evans, has for some years been my sister's confidential maid. ⁴⁶²I have brought them here because I feel that my best course is to explain the true position to you, and they are the two people upon earth who can substantiate what I say.”

⁴⁶³“Is this necessary, Sir Robert? ⁴⁶⁴Have you thought what you are doing?” cried the woman.

⁴⁶⁵“As to me, I entirely disclaim all responsibility,” said her husband.

⁴⁶⁶Sir Robert gave him a glance of contempt. ⁴⁶⁷“I will take all responsibility,” said he. ⁴⁶⁸“Now, Mr. Holmes, listen to a plain statement of the facts.

⁴⁶⁹“You have clearly gone pretty deeply into my affairs or I should not have found you where I did. ⁴⁷⁰Therefore, you know already, in all probability, that I am running a dark horse for the Derby and that everything depends upon my success. ⁴⁷¹If I win, all is easy. ⁴⁷²If I lose—well, I dare not think of that!”

⁴⁷³“I understand the position,” said Holmes.

⁴⁷⁴“I am dependent upon my sister, Lady Beatrice, for everything. ⁴⁷⁵But it is well known that her interest in the estate is for her own life only. ⁴⁷⁶For myself, I am deeply in the hands of the Jews. ⁴⁷⁷I have always known that if my sister were to die my creditors would be on to my estate like a flock of vultures. ⁴⁷⁸Everything would be seized—my stables, my horses—everything. ⁴⁷⁹Well, Mr. Holmes, my sister did die just a week ago.”

⁴⁸⁰“And you told no one!”

⁴⁸¹“What could I do? ⁴⁸²Absolute ruin faced me. ⁴⁸³If I could stave things off for three weeks all would be well. ⁴⁸⁴Her maid's husband—this man here—is an actor. ⁴⁸⁵It came into our heads—it came into my head—that he could for that short period personate my sister. ⁴⁸⁶It was but a case of appearing daily in the carriage, for no one need enter her room save the maid. ⁴⁸⁷It was not difficult to arrange. ⁴⁸⁸My sister died of the dropsy which had long afflicted her.”

⁴⁸⁹“That will be for a coroner to decide.”

⁴⁹⁰“Her doctor would certify that for months her symptoms have threatened such an end.”

⁴⁹¹“Well, what did you do?”

⁴⁹²“The body could not remain there. ⁴⁹³On the first night Norlett and I carried it out to the old well-house, which is now never used. ⁴⁹⁴We were followed, however, by her pet spaniel, which yapped continually at the door, so I felt some safer place was needed. ⁴⁹⁵I got rid of the spaniel, and we carried the body to the crypt of the church. ⁴⁹⁶There was no indignity or irreverence, Mr. Holmes. ⁴⁹⁷I do not feel that I have wronged the dead.”

⁴⁹⁸“Your conduct seems to me inexcusable, Sir Robert.”

⁴⁹⁹The baronet shook his head impatiently. ⁵⁰⁰“It is easy to preach,” said he. ⁵⁰¹“Perhaps you would have felt differently if you had been in my position. ⁵⁰²One cannot see all one's hopes and all one's plans shattered at the last moment and make no effort to save them. ⁵⁰³It seemed to me that it would be no unworthy resting-place if we put her for the time in one of the coffins of her husband's ancestors lying in what is still consecrated ground. ⁵⁰⁴We opened such a coffin, removed the contents, and placed her as you have seen her. ⁵⁰⁵As to the old relics which we took out, we could not leave them on the floor of the crypt. ⁵⁰⁶Norlett and I removed them, and he descended at night and burned them in the central furnace. ⁵⁰⁷There is my story, Mr. Holmes, though how you forced my hand so that I have to tell it is more than I can say.”

⁵⁰⁸Holmes sat for some time lost in thought.

⁵⁰⁹“There is one flaw in your narrative, Sir Robert,” he said at last. ⁵¹⁰“Your bets on the race, and therefore your hopes for the future, would hold good even if your creditors seized your estate.”

⁵¹¹“The horse would be part of the estate. ⁵¹²What do they care for my bets? ⁵¹³As likely as not they would not run him at all. ⁵¹⁴My chief creditor is, unhappily, my most bitter enemy—a rascally fellow, Sam Brewer, whom I was once compelled to horsewhip on Newmarket Heath. ⁵¹⁵Do you suppose that he would try to save me?”

⁵¹⁶“Well, Sir Robert,” said Holmes, rising, “this matter must, of course, be referred to the police. ⁵¹⁷It was my duty to bring the facts to light, and there I must leave it. ⁵¹⁸As to the morality or decency of your conduct, it is not for me to express an opinion. ⁵¹⁹It is nearly midnight, Watson, and I think we may make our way back to our humble abode.”

⁵²⁰It is generally known now that this singular episode ended upon a happier note than Sir Robert's actions deserved. ⁵²¹Shoscombe Prince did win the Derby, the sporting owner did net eighty thousand pounds in bets, and the creditors did hold their hand until the race was over, when they were paid in

full, and enough was left to reestablish Sir Robert in a fair position in life. ⁵²²Both police and coroner took a lenient view of the transaction, and beyond a mild censure for the delay in registering the lady's decease, the lucky owner got away scatheless from this strange incident in a career which has now outlived its shadows and promises to end in an honoured old age.

The Adventure of the Retired Colourman

¹Sherlock Holmes was in a melancholy and philosophic mood that morning. ²His alert practical nature was subject to such reactions.

³“Did you see him?” he asked.

⁴“You mean the old fellow who has just gone out?”

⁵“Precisely.”

⁶“Yes, I met him at the door.”

⁷“What did you think of him?”

⁸“A pathetic, futile, broken creature.”

⁹“Exactly, Watson. ¹⁰Pathetic and futile. ¹¹But is not all life pathetic and futile? ¹²Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? ¹³We reach. ¹⁴We grasp. ¹⁵And what is left in our hands at the end? ¹⁶A shadow. ¹⁷Or worse than a shadow—misery.”

¹⁸“Is he one of your clients?”

¹⁹“Well, I suppose I may call him so. ²⁰He has been sent on by the Yard. ²¹Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack. ²²They argue that they can do nothing more, and that whatever happens the patient can be no worse than he is.”

²³“What is the matter?”

²⁴Holmes took a rather soiled card from the table. ²⁵“Josiah Amberley. ²⁶He says he was junior partner of Brickfall and Amberley, who are manufacturers of artistic materials. ²⁷You will see their names upon paint-boxes. ²⁸He made his little pile, retired from business at the age of sixty-one, bought a house at Lewisham, and settled down to rest after a life of ceaseless grind. ²⁹One would think his future was tolerably assured.”

³⁰“Yes, indeed.”

³¹Holmes glanced over some notes which he had scribbled upon the back of an envelope.

³²“Retired in 1896, Watson. ³³Early in 1897 he married a woman twenty years younger than himself—a good-looking woman, too, if the photograph does not flatter. ³⁴A competence, a wife, leisure—it seemed a straight road which lay before him. ³⁵And yet within two years he is, as you have seen, as broken and miserable a creature as crawls beneath the sun.”

³⁶“But what has happened?”

³⁷“The old story, Watson. ³⁸A treacherous friend and a fickle wife. ³⁹It would appear that Amberley has one hobby in life, and it is chess. ⁴⁰Not far from him at Lewisham there lives a young doctor who is also a chess-player. ⁴¹I have noted his name as Dr. Ray Ernest. ⁴²Ernest was frequently in the house, and an intimacy between him and Mrs. Amberley was a natural sequence, for you must admit that our unfortunate client has few outward graces, whatever his inner virtues may be. ⁴³The couple went off together last week—destination untraced. ⁴⁴What is more, the faithless spouse carried off the old man's deed-box as her personal luggage with a good part of his life's savings within. ⁴⁵Can we find the lady? ⁴⁶Can we save the money? ⁴⁷A commonplace problem so far as it has developed, and yet a vital one for Josiah Amberley.”

⁴⁸“What will you do about it?”

⁴⁹“Well, the immediate question, my dear Watson, happens to be, What will you do?—if you will be good enough to understudy me. ⁵⁰You know that I am preoccupied with this case of the two Coptic Patriarchs, which should come to a head to-day. ⁵¹I really have not time to go out to Lewisham, and yet evidence taken on the spot has a special value. ⁵²The old fellow was quite insistent that I should go, but I explained my difficulty. ⁵³He is prepared to meet a representative.”

⁵⁴“By all means,” I answered. ⁵⁵“I confess I don't see that I can be of much service, but I am willing to do my best.” ⁵⁶And so it was that on a summer afternoon I set forth to Lewisham, little dreaming that within a week the affair in which I was engaging would be the eager debate of all England.

⁵⁷It was late that evening before I returned to Baker Street and gave an account of my mission. ⁵⁸Holmes lay with his gaunt figure stretched in his deep chair, his pipe curling forth slow wreaths of acrid tobacco, while his eyelids drooped over his eyes so lazily that he might almost have been asleep were it not that at any halt or questionable passage of my narrative they half lifted, and two gray eyes, as bright and keen as rapiers, transfixed me with their searching glance.

⁵⁹“The Haven is the name of Mr. Josiah Amberley's house,” I explained. ⁶⁰“I think it would interest you, Holmes. ⁶¹It is like some penurious patrician who has sunk into the company of his inferiors. ⁶²You know that particular quarter, the monotonous brick streets, the weary suburban highways. ⁶³Right in the middle of them, a little island of ancient culture and comfort, lies this old home, surrounded by a high sun-baked wall mottled with lichens and topped with moss, the sort of wall—”

⁶⁴“Cut out the poetry, Watson,” said Holmes severely. ⁶⁵“I note that it was a high brick wall.”

⁶⁶“Exactly. ⁶⁷I should not have known which was The Haven had I not asked a lounge who was smoking in the street. ⁶⁸I have a reason for mentioning him. ⁶⁹He was a tall, dark, heavily moustached, rather military-looking man. ⁷⁰He nodded in answer to my inquiry and gave me a curiously questioning glance, which came back to my memory a little later.

⁷¹“I had hardly entered the gateway before I saw Mr. Amberley coming down the drive. ⁷²I only had a glimpse of him this morning, and he certainly gave me the impression of a strange creature, but when I saw him in full light his appearance was even more abnormal.”

⁷³“I have, of course, studied it, and yet I should be interested to have your impression,” said Holmes.

⁷⁴“He seemed to me like a man who was literally bowed down by care. ⁷⁵His back was curved as though he carried a heavy burden. ⁷⁶Yet he was not the weakling that I had at first imagined, for his shoulders and chest have the framework of a giant, though his figure tapers away into a pair of spindled legs.”

⁷⁷“Left shoe wrinkled, right one smooth.”

⁷⁸“I did not observe that.”

⁷⁹“No, you wouldn't. ⁸⁰I spotted his artificial limb. ⁸¹But proceed.”

⁸²“I was struck by the snaky locks of grizzled hair which curled from under his old straw hat, and his face with its fierce, eager expression and the deeply lined features.”

⁸³“Very good, Watson. ⁸⁴What did he say?”

⁸⁵“He began pouring out the story of his grievances. ⁸⁶We walked down the drive together, and of course I took a good look round. ⁸⁷I have never seen a worse-kept place. ⁸⁸The garden was all running to seed, giving me an impression of wild neglect in which the plants had been allowed to find the way of Nature rather than of art. ⁸⁹How any decent woman could have tolerated such a state of things, I don't know. ⁹⁰The house, too, was slatternly to the last degree, but the poor man seemed himself to be aware of it

and to be trying to remedy it, for a great pot of green paint stood in the centre of the hall, and he was carrying a thick brush in his left hand. ⁹¹He had been working on the woodwork.

⁹²“He took me into his dingy sanctum, and we had a long chat. ⁹³Of course, he was disappointed that you had not come yourself. ⁹⁴‘I hardly expected,’ he said, ‘that so humble an individual as myself, especially after my heavy financial loss, could obtain the complete attention of so famous a man as Mr. Sherlock Holmes.’

⁹⁵“I assured him that the financial question did not arise. ⁹⁶‘No, of course, it is art for art's sake with him,’ said he, ‘but even on the artistic side of crime he might have found something here to study. ⁹⁷And human nature, Dr. Watson—the black ingratitude of it all! ⁹⁸When did I ever refuse one of her requests? ⁹⁹Was ever a woman so pampered? ¹⁰⁰And that young man—he might have been my own son. ¹⁰¹He had the run of my house. ¹⁰²And yet see how they have treated me! ¹⁰³Oh, Dr. Watson, it is a dreadful, dreadful world!’

¹⁰⁴“That was the burden of his song for an hour or more. ¹⁰⁵He had, it seems, no suspicion of an intrigue. ¹⁰⁶They lived alone save for a woman who comes in by the day and leaves every evening at six. ¹⁰⁷On that particular evening old Amberley, wishing to give his wife a treat, had taken two upper circle seats at the Haymarket Theatre. ¹⁰⁸At the last moment she had complained of a headache and had refused to go. ¹⁰⁹He had gone alone. ¹¹⁰There seemed to be no doubt about the fact, for he produced the unused ticket which he had taken for his wife.”

¹¹¹“That is remarkable—most remarkable,” said Holmes, whose interest in the case seemed to be rising. ¹¹²“Pray continue, Watson. ¹¹³I find your narrative most arresting. ¹¹⁴Did you personally examine this ticket? ¹¹⁵You did not, perchance, take the number?”

¹¹⁶“It so happens that I did,” I answered with some pride. ¹¹⁷“It chanced to be my old school number, thirty-one, and so is stuck in my head.”

¹¹⁸“Excellent, Watson! ¹¹⁹His seat, then, was either thirty or thirty-two.”

¹²⁰“Quite so,” I answered with some mystification. ¹²¹“And on B row.”

¹²²“That is most satisfactory. ¹²³What else did he tell you?”

¹²⁴“He showed me his strong-room, as he called it. ¹²⁵It really is a strong-room—like a bank—with iron door and shutter—burglar-proof, as he claimed. ¹²⁶However, the woman seems to have had a duplicate key, and between them they had carried off some seven thousand pounds' worth of cash and securities.”

¹²⁷“Securities! ¹²⁸How could they dispose of those?”

¹²⁹“He said that he had given the police a list and that he hoped they would be unsaleable. ¹³⁰He had got back from the theatre about midnight and found the place plundered, the door and window open, and the fugitives gone. ¹³¹There was no letter or message, nor has he heard a word since. ¹³²He at once gave the alarm to the police.”

¹³³Holmes brooded for some minutes.

¹³⁴“You say he was painting. ¹³⁵What was he painting?”

¹³⁶“Well, he was painting the passage. ¹³⁷But he had already painted the door and woodwork of this room I spoke of.”

¹³⁸“Does it not strike you as a strange occupation in the circumstances?”

¹³⁹“‘One must do something to ease an aching heart.’ ¹⁴⁰That was his own explanation. ¹⁴¹It was eccentric, no doubt, but he is clearly an eccentric man. ¹⁴²He tore up one of his wife's photographs in

my presence—tore it up furiously in a tempest of passion. ¹⁴³“I never wish to see her damned face again,” he shrieked.”

¹⁴⁴“Anything more, Watson?”

¹⁴⁵“Yes, one thing which struck me more than anything else. ¹⁴⁶I had driven to the Blackheath Station and had caught my train there when, just as it was starting, I saw a man dart into the carriage next to my own. ¹⁴⁷You know that I have a quick eye for faces, Holmes. ¹⁴⁸It was undoubtedly the tall, dark man whom I had addressed in the street. ¹⁴⁹I saw him once more at London Bridge, and then I lost him in the crowd. ¹⁵⁰But I am convinced that he was following me.”

¹⁵¹“No doubt! ¹⁵²No doubt!” said Holmes. ¹⁵³“A tall, dark, heavily moustached man, you say, with gray-tinted sun-glasses?”

¹⁵⁴“Holmes, you are a wizard. ¹⁵⁵I did not say so, but he had gray-tinted sun-glasses.”

¹⁵⁶“And a Masonic tie-pin?”

¹⁵⁷“Holmes!”

¹⁵⁸“Quite simple, my dear Watson. ¹⁵⁹But let us get down to what is practical. ¹⁶⁰I must admit to you that the case, which seemed to me to be so absurdly simple as to be hardly worth my notice, is rapidly assuming a very different aspect. ¹⁶¹It is true that though in your mission you have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought.”

¹⁶²“What have I missed?”

¹⁶³“Don't be hurt, my dear fellow. ¹⁶⁴You know that I am quite impersonal. ¹⁶⁵No one else would have done better. ¹⁶⁶Some possibly not so well. ¹⁶⁷But clearly you have missed some vital points. ¹⁶⁸What is the opinion of the neighbours about this man Amberley and his wife? ¹⁶⁹That surely is of importance. ¹⁷⁰What of Dr. Ernest? ¹⁷¹Was he the gay Lothario one would expect? ¹⁷²With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice. ¹⁷³What about the girl at the post-office, or the wife of the greengrocer? ¹⁷⁴I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange. ¹⁷⁵All this you have left undone.”

¹⁷⁶“It can still be done.”

¹⁷⁷“It has been done. ¹⁷⁸Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without leaving this room. ¹⁷⁹As a matter of fact, my information confirms the man's story. ¹⁸⁰He has the local repute of being a miser as well as a harsh and exacting husband. ¹⁸¹That he had a large sum of money in that strong-room of his is certain. ¹⁸²So also is it that young Dr. Ernest, an unmarried man, played chess with Amberley, and probably played the fool with his wife. ¹⁸³All this seems plain sailing, and one would think that there was no more to be said—and yet!—and yet!”

¹⁸⁴“Where lies the difficulty?”

¹⁸⁵“In my imagination, perhaps. ¹⁸⁶Well, leave it there, Watson. ¹⁸⁷Let us escape from this weary workaday world by the side door of music. ¹⁸⁸Carina sings to-night at the Albert Hall, and we still have time to dress, dine, and enjoy.”

¹⁸⁹In the morning I was up betimes, but some toast crumbs and two empty egg-shells told me that my companion was earlier still. ¹⁹⁰I found a scribbled note upon the table.

¹⁹¹Dear Watson:

¹⁹²There are one or two points of contact which I should wish to establish with Mr. Josiah Amberley.
¹⁹³When I have done so we can dismiss the case—or not. ¹⁹⁴I would only ask you to be on hand about three o'clock, as I conceive it possible that I may want you.

¹⁹⁵S. H.

¹⁹⁶I saw nothing of Holmes all day, but at the hour named he returned, grave, preoccupied, and aloof.

¹⁹⁷At such times it was wiser to leave him to himself.

¹⁹⁸“Has Amberley been here yet?”

¹⁹⁹“No.”

²⁰⁰“Ah! ²⁰¹I am expecting him.”

²⁰²He was not disappointed, for presently the old fellow arrived with a very worried and puzzled expression upon his austere face.

²⁰³“I've had a telegram, Mr. Holmes. ²⁰⁴I can make nothing of it.” ²⁰⁵He handed it over, and Holmes read it aloud.

²⁰⁶“Come at once without fail. ²⁰⁷Can give you information as to your recent loss.

²⁰⁸“Elman.

²⁰⁹“The Vicarage.

²¹⁰“Dispatched at 2.10 from Little Purlington,” said Holmes. ²¹¹“Little Purlington is in Essex, I believe, not far from Frinton. ²¹²Well, of course you will start at once. ²¹³This is evidently from a responsible person, the vicar of the place. ²¹⁴Where is my Crockford? ²¹⁵Yes, here we have him: ²¹⁶J. C. Elman, M. A., Living of Moosmoor cum Little Purlington.’ ²¹⁷Look up the trains, Watson.”

²¹⁸“There is one at 5.20 from Liverpool Street.”

²¹⁹“Excellent. ²²⁰You had best go with him, Watson. ²²¹He may need help or advice. ²²²Clearly we have come to a crisis in this affair.”

²²³But our client seemed by no means eager to start.

²²⁴“It's perfectly absurd, Mr. Holmes,” he said. ²²⁵“What can this man possibly know of what has occurred? ²²⁶It is waste of time and money.”

²²⁷“He would not have telegraphed to you if he did not know something. ²²⁸Wire at once that you are coming.”

²²⁹“I don't think I shall go.”

²³⁰Holmes assumed his sternest aspect.

²³¹“It would make the worst possible impression both on the police and upon myself, Mr. Amberley, if when so obvious a clue arose you should refuse to follow it up. ²³²We should feel that you were not really in earnest in this investigation.”

²³³Our client seemed horrified at the suggestion.

²³⁴“Why, of course I shall go if you look at it in that way,” said he. ²³⁵“On the face of it, it seems absurd to suppose that this person knows anything, but if you think—”

²³⁶“I do think,” said Holmes with emphasis, and so we were launched upon our journey. ²³⁷Holmes took me aside before we left the room and gave me one word of counsel, which showed that he considered

the matter to be of importance. ²³⁸“Whatever you do, see that he really does go,” said he. ²³⁹“Should he break away or return, get to the nearest telephone exchange and send the single word ‘Bolted.’” ²⁴⁰I will arrange here that it shall reach me wherever I am.”

²⁴¹Little Purlington is not an easy place to reach, for it is on a branch line. ²⁴²My remembrance of the journey is not a pleasant one, for the weather was hot, the train slow, and my companion sullen and silent, hardly talking at all save to make an occasional sardonic remark as to the futility of our proceedings. ²⁴³When we at last reached the little station it was a two-mile drive before we came to the Vicarage, where a big, solemn, rather pompous clergyman received us in his study. ²⁴⁴Our telegram lay before him.

²⁴⁵“Well, gentlemen,” he asked, “what can I do for you?”

²⁴⁶“We came,” I explained, “in answer to your wire.”

²⁴⁷“My wire! ²⁴⁸I sent no wire.”

²⁴⁹“I mean the wire which you sent to Mr. Josiah Amberley about his wife and his money.”

²⁵⁰“If this is a joke, sir, it is a very questionable one,” said the vicar angrily. ²⁵¹“I have never heard of the gentleman you name, and I have not sent a wire to anyone.”

²⁵²Our client and I looked at each other in amazement.

²⁵³“Perhaps there is some mistake,” said I; “are there perhaps two vicarages?” ²⁵⁴Here is the wire itself, signed Elman and dated from the Vicarage.”

²⁵⁵“There is only one vicarage, sir, and only one vicar, and this wire is a scandalous forgery, the origin of which shall certainly be investigated by the police. ²⁵⁶Meanwhile, I can see no possible object in prolonging this interview.”

²⁵⁷So Mr. Amberley and I found ourselves on the roadside in what seemed to me to be the most primitive village in England. ²⁵⁸We made for the telegraph office, but it was already closed. ²⁵⁹There was a telephone, however, at the little Railway Arms, and by it I got into touch with Holmes, who shared in our amazement at the result of our journey.

²⁶⁰“Most singular!” said the distant voice. ²⁶¹“Most remarkable! ²⁶²I much fear, my dear Watson, that there is no return train to-night. ²⁶³I have unwittingly condemned you to the horrors of a country inn. ²⁶⁴However, there is always Nature, Watson—Nature and Josiah Amberley—you can be in close commune with both.” ²⁶⁵I heard his dry chuckle as he turned away.

²⁶⁶It was soon apparent to me that my companion's reputation as a miser was not undeserved. ²⁶⁷He had grumbled at the expense of the journey, had insisted upon travelling third-class, and was now clamorous in his objections to the hotel bill. ²⁶⁸Next morning, when we did at last arrive in London, it was hard to say which of us was in the worse humour.

²⁶⁹“You had best take Baker Street as we pass,” said I. ²⁷⁰“Mr. Holmes may have some fresh instructions.”

²⁷¹“If they are not worth more than the last ones they are not of much use,” said Amberley with a malevolent scowl. ²⁷²None the less, he kept me company. ²⁷³I had already warned Holmes by telegram of the hour of our arrival, but we found a message waiting that he was at Lewisham and would expect us there. ²⁷⁴That was a surprise, but an even greater one was to find that he was not alone in the sitting-room of our client. ²⁷⁵A stern-looking, impassive man sat beside him, a dark man with gray-tinted glasses and a large Masonic pin projecting from his tie.

²⁷⁶“This is my friend Mr. Barker,” said Holmes. ²⁷⁷“He has been interesting himself also in your business, Mr. Josiah Amberley, though we have been working independently. ²⁷⁸But we both have the same question to ask you!”

²⁷⁹Mr. Amberley sat down heavily. ²⁸⁰He sensed impending danger. ²⁸¹I read it in his straining eyes and his twitching features.

²⁸²“What is the question, Mr. Holmes?”

²⁸³“Only this: What did you do with the bodies?”

²⁸⁴The man sprang to his feet with a hoarse scream. ²⁸⁵He clawed into the air with his bony hands. ²⁸⁶His mouth was open, and for the instant he looked like some horrible bird of prey. ²⁸⁷In a flash we got a glimpse of the real Josiah Amberley, a misshapen demon with a soul as distorted as his body. ²⁸⁸As he fell back into his chair he clapped his hand to his lips as if to stifle a cough. ²⁸⁹Holmes sprang at his throat like a tiger and twisted his face towards the ground. ²⁹⁰A white pellet fell from between his gasping lips.

²⁹¹“No short cuts, Josiah Amberley. ²⁹²Things must be done decently and in order. ²⁹³What about it, Barker?”

²⁹⁴“I have a cab at the door,” said our taciturn companion.

²⁹⁵“It is only a few hundred yards to the station. ²⁹⁶We will go together. ²⁹⁷You can stay here, Watson. ²⁹⁸I shall be back within half an hour.”

²⁹⁹The old colourman had the strength of a lion in that great trunk of his, but he was helpless in the hands of the two experienced man-handlers. ³⁰⁰Wriggling and twisting he was dragged to the waiting cab, and I was left to my solitary vigil in the ill-omened house. ³⁰¹In less time than he had named, however, Holmes was back, in company with a smart young police inspector.

³⁰²“I’ve left Barker to look after the formalities,” said Holmes. ³⁰³“You had not met Barker, Watson. ³⁰⁴He is my hated rival upon the Surrey shore. ³⁰⁵When you said a tall dark man it was not difficult for me to complete the picture. ³⁰⁶He has several good cases to his credit, has he not, Inspector?”

³⁰⁷“He has certainly interfered several times,” the inspector answered with reserve.

³⁰⁸“His methods are irregular, no doubt, like my own. ³⁰⁹The irregulars are useful sometimes, you know. ³¹⁰You, for example, with your compulsory warning about whatever he said being used against him, could never have bluffed this rascal into what is virtually a confession.”

³¹¹“Perhaps not. ³¹²But we get there all the same, Mr. Holmes. ³¹³Don’t imagine that we had not formed our own views of this case, and that we would not have laid our hands on our man. ³¹⁴You will excuse us for feeling sore when you jump in with methods which we cannot use, and so rob us of the credit.”

³¹⁵“There shall be no such robbery, MacKinnon. ³¹⁶I assure you that I efface myself from now onward, and as to Barker, he has done nothing save what I told him.”

³¹⁷The inspector seemed considerably relieved.

³¹⁸“That is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. ³¹⁹Praise or blame can matter little to you, but it is very different to us when the newspapers begin to ask questions.”

³²⁰“Quite so. ³²¹But they are pretty sure to ask questions anyhow, so it would be as well to have answers. ³²²What will you say, for example, when the intelligent and enterprising reporter asks you what the exact points were which aroused your suspicion, and finally gave you a certain conviction as to the real facts?”

³²³The inspector looked puzzled.

³²⁴“We don't seem to have got any real facts yet, Mr. Holmes. ³²⁵You say that the prisoner, in the presence of three witnesses, practically confessed by trying to commit suicide, that he had murdered his wife and her lover. ³²⁶What other facts have you?”

³²⁷“Have you arranged for a search?”

³²⁸“There are three constables on their way.”

³²⁹“Then you will soon get the clearest fact of all. ³³⁰The bodies cannot be far away. ³³¹Try the cellars and the garden. ³³²It should not take long to dig up the likely places. ³³³This house is older than the water-pipes. ³³⁴There must be a disused well somewhere. ³³⁵Try your luck there.”

³³⁶“But how did you know of it, and how was it done?”

³³⁷“I'll show you first how it was done, and then I will give the explanation which is due to you, and even more to my long-suffering friend here, who has been invaluable throughout. ³³⁸But, first, I would give you an insight into this man's mentality. ³³⁹It is a very unusual one—so much so that I think his destination is more likely to be Broadmoor than the scaffold. ³⁴⁰He has, to a high degree, the sort of mind which one associates with the mediaeval Italian nature rather than with the modern Briton. ³⁴¹He was a miserable miser who made his wife so wretched by his niggardly ways that she was a ready prey for any adventurer. ³⁴²Such a one came upon the scene in the person of this chess-playing doctor. ³⁴³Amberley excelled at chess—one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind. ³⁴⁴Like all misers, he was a jealous man, and his jealousy became a frantic mania. ³⁴⁵Rightly or wrongly, he suspected an intrigue. ³⁴⁶He determined to have his revenge, and he planned it with diabolical cleverness. ³⁴⁷Come here!”

³⁴⁸Holmes led us along the passage with as much certainty as if he had lived in the house and halted at the open door of the strong-room.

³⁴⁹“Pooh! ³⁵⁰What an awful smell of paint!” cried the inspector.

³⁵¹“That was our first clue,” said Holmes. ³⁵²“You can thank Dr. Watson's observation for that, though he failed to draw the inference. ³⁵³It set my foot upon the trail. ³⁵⁴Why should this man at such a time be filling his house with strong odours? ³⁵⁵Obviously, to cover some other smell which he wished to conceal—some guilty smell which would suggest suspicions. ³⁵⁶Then came the idea of a room such as you see here with iron door and shutter—a hermetically sealed room. ³⁵⁷Put those two facts together, and whither do they lead? ³⁵⁸I could only determine that by examining the house myself. ³⁵⁹I was already certain that the case was serious, for I had examined the box-office chart at the Haymarket Theatre—another of Dr. Watson's bull's-eyes—and ascertained that neither B thirty nor thirty-two of the upper circle had been occupied that night. ³⁶⁰Therefore, Amberley had not been to the theatre, and his alibi fell to the ground. ³⁶¹He made a bad slip when he allowed my astute friend to notice the number of the seat taken for his wife. ³⁶²The question now arose how I might be able to examine the house. ³⁶³I sent an agent to the most impossible village I could think of, and summoned my man to it at such an hour that he could not possibly get back. ³⁶⁴To prevent any miscarriage, Dr. Watson accompanied him. ³⁶⁵The good vicar's name I took, of course, out of my Crockford. ³⁶⁶Do I make it all clear to you?”

³⁶⁷“It is masterly,” said the inspector in an awed voice.

³⁶⁸“There being no fear of interruption I proceeded to burgle the house. ³⁶⁹Burglary has always been an alternative profession had I cared to adopt it, and I have little doubt that I should have come to the front. ³⁷⁰Observe what I found. ³⁷¹You see the gas-pipe along the skirting here. ³⁷²Very good. ³⁷³It rises in the angle of the wall, and there is a tap here in the corner. ³⁷⁴The pipe runs out into the strong-room, as you can see, and ends in that plaster rose in the centre of the ceiling, where it is concealed by the ornamentation. ³⁷⁵That end is wide open. ³⁷⁶At any moment by turning the outside tap the room could

be flooded with gas. ³⁷⁷With door and shutter closed and the tap full on I would not give two minutes of conscious sensation to anyone shut up in that little chamber. ³⁷⁸By what devilish device he decoyed them there I do not know, but once inside the door they were at his mercy.”

³⁷⁹The inspector examined the pipe with interest. ³⁸⁰“One of our officers mentioned the smell of gas,” said he, “but of course the window and door were open then, and the paint—or some of it—was already about. ³⁸¹He had begun the work of painting the day before, according to his story. ³⁸²But what next, Mr. Holmes?”

³⁸³“Well, then came an incident which was rather unexpected to myself. ³⁸⁴I was slipping through the pantry window in the early dawn when I felt a hand inside my collar, and a voice said: ‘Now, you rascal, what are you doing in there?’ ³⁸⁵When I could twist my head round I looked into the tinted spectacles of my friend and rival, Mr. Barker. ³⁸⁶It was a curious foregathering and set us both smiling. ³⁸⁷It seems that he had been engaged by Dr. Ray Ernest’s family to make some investigations and had come to the same conclusion as to foul play. ³⁸⁸He had watched the house for some days and had spotted Dr. Watson as one of the obviously suspicious characters who had called there. ³⁸⁹He could hardly arrest Watson, but when he saw a man actually climbing out of the pantry window there came a limit to his restraint. ³⁹⁰Of course, I told him how matters stood and we continued the case together.”

³⁹¹“Why him? ³⁹²Why not us?”

³⁹³“Because it was in my mind to put that little test which answered so admirably. ³⁹⁴I fear you would not have gone so far.”

³⁹⁵The inspector smiled.

³⁹⁶“Well, maybe not. ³⁹⁷I understand that I have your word, Mr. Holmes, that you step right out of the case now and that you turn all your results over to us.”

³⁹⁸“Certainly, that is always my custom.”

³⁹⁹“Well, in the name of the force I thank you. ⁴⁰⁰It seems a clear case, as you put it, and there can’t be much difficulty over the bodies.”

⁴⁰¹“I’ll show you a grim little bit of evidence,” said Holmes, “and I am sure Amberley himself never observed it. ⁴⁰²You’ll get results, Inspector, by always putting yourself in the other fellow’s place, and thinking what you would do yourself. ⁴⁰³It takes some imagination, but it pays. ⁴⁰⁴Now, we will suppose that you were shut up in this little room, had not two minutes to live, but wanted to get even with the fiend who was probably mocking at you from the other side of the door. ⁴⁰⁵What would you do?”

⁴⁰⁶“Write a message.”

⁴⁰⁷“Exactly. ⁴⁰⁸You would like to tell people how you died. ⁴⁰⁹No use writing on paper. ⁴¹⁰That would be seen. ⁴¹¹If you wrote on the wall someone might rest upon it. ⁴¹²Now, look here! ⁴¹³Just above the skirting is scribbled with a purple indelible pencil: ‘We we—’ ⁴¹⁴That’s all.”

⁴¹⁵“What do you make of that?”

⁴¹⁶“Well, it’s only a foot above the ground. ⁴¹⁷The poor devil was on the floor dying when he wrote it. ⁴¹⁸He lost his senses before he could finish.”

⁴¹⁹“He was writing, ‘We were murdered.’”

⁴²⁰“That’s how I read it. ⁴²¹If you find an indelible pencil on the body—”

⁴²²“We’ll look out for it, you may be sure. ⁴²³But those securities? ⁴²⁴Clearly there was no robbery at all.

⁴²⁵And yet he did possess those bonds. ⁴²⁶We verified that.”

⁴²⁷“You may be sure he has them hidden in a safe place. ⁴²⁸When the whole elopement had passed into history, he would suddenly discover them and announce that the guilty couple had relented and sent back the plunder or had dropped it on the way.”

⁴²⁹“You certainly seem to have met every difficulty,” said the inspector. ⁴³⁰“Of course, he was bound to call us in, but why he should have gone to you I can't understand.”

⁴³¹“Pure swank!” Holmes answered. ⁴³²“He felt so clever and so sure of himself that he imagined no one could touch him. ⁴³³He could say to any suspicious neighbour, ‘Look at the steps I have taken. ⁴³⁴I have consulted not only the police but even Sherlock Holmes.’”

⁴³⁵The inspector laughed.

⁴³⁶“We must forgive you your ‘even,’ Mr. Holmes,” said he, “it's as workmanlike a job as I can remember.”

⁴³⁷A couple of days later my friend tossed across to me a copy of the bi-weekly North Surrey Observer.

⁴³⁸Under a series of flaming headlines, which began with “The Haven Horror” and ended with “Brilliant Police Investigation,” there was a packed column of print which gave the first consecutive account of the affair. ⁴³⁹The concluding paragraph is typical of the whole. ⁴⁴⁰It ran thus:

⁴⁴¹The remarkable acumen by which Inspector MacKinnon deduced from the smell of paint that some other smell, that of gas, for example, might be concealed; the bold deduction that the strong-room might also be the death-chamber, and the subsequent inquiry which led to the discovery of the bodies in a disused well, cleverly concealed by a dog-kennel, should live in the history of crime as a standing example of the intelligence of our professional detectives.

⁴⁴²“Well, well, MacKinnon is a good fellow,” said Holmes with a tolerant smile. ⁴⁴³“You can file it in our archives, Watson. ⁴⁴⁴Some day the true story may be told.”

The Missing “U”s

U.K. readers will no doubt be irked by the American spellings in this text. The principal problem is the American aversion to the letter “u”. They choose to write “color” and “labor” where we would choose to write real words instead. Therefore, for the benefit of Actual English speakers I provide this appendix which includes all the “u”s that are missing from the text:

[illegible]

1125

1126