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Arthur Conan Doyle, The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

The Adventure of the Illustrious Client

Part 1

It was many years before my friend allowed me to tell this story. When I asked him again, he gave a short nod and said it could do no harm now. That is why I am able at last to write about what was, in some ways, one of the most serious moments of his life.

Holmes and I both liked to visit the Turkish bath in Northumberland Avenue. In the quiet room upstairs, where two couches stood side by side, he was often more open than in Baker Street. On the third of September, 1902, we lay there after our bath, resting in the warm air. I asked him whether any new case was at hand. Without speaking at first, he stretched out his long arm from the sheet that covered him and took an envelope from his coat.

“It may be foolish talk,” he said calmly. “It may be something far worse. I know only what is written here.”

The letter was from the Carlton Club. A certain Sir James Damery asked to see Mr. Sherlock Holmes at half past four the next afternoon. The matter, he wrote, was both delicate and very important. He hoped Holmes would agree and confirm the meeting by telephone.

“I have already agreed,” said Holmes when I finished reading. “Do you know

anything about Sir James Damery?"

"Only that he is well known in society."

"He is more than that," Holmes replied. "He is often asked to manage private affairs that must not reach the newspapers. He is a careful and clever man. I hope, therefore, that this is not a false alarm. Perhaps he truly needs us."

"Us?" I asked.

"If you will assist me, Watson."

"With pleasure."

I was living in Queen Anne Street at that time, yet I arrived at Baker Street before the hour named. Exactly at half past four, Sir James was shown in. He was a large man, clean shaven, with clear grey eyes and a strong voice. His dress was perfect in every detail. He filled the small room with his presence.

After greeting us politely, he said, "Dr. Watson's help may be needed, for we are dealing with a man who fears nothing and who may use violence without thought. I believe there is no more dangerous man in Europe."

Holmes smiled slightly and lit his pipe. "I have heard such words before. If your man is more dangerous than Professor Moriarty was, or than Colonel Moran is, then he must indeed be worth meeting. May I know his name?"

"Have you heard of Baron Gruner?" Sir James asked.

"The Austrian who was tried for murder?" said Holmes at once.

Sir James lifted his hands in surprise. "There is no hiding anything from you. Yes, that man. You believe him guilty?"

"I follow crime on the Continent," Holmes answered quietly. "The case in Prague was saved by a legal point and by the sudden death of a witness. I am certain he killed his wife when she fell from the mountain pass. I also know he is now in England. I expected that one day he would cross my path. What has he done?"

"It is not the old crime that troubles us," said Sir James. "It is what may happen in the future. To punish a crime is one thing. To stop one before it is done is greater. I am here to prevent a tragedy."

Holmes leaned forward. "Who is in danger?"

“General de Merville’s daughter,” Sir James replied. “Miss Violet de Merville. She is young, rich, beautiful, and admired by many. She is now engaged to Baron Gruner.”

“She loves him?” Holmes asked.

“With her whole heart,” said Sir James sadly. “He is handsome and charming. He speaks gently and carries an air of mystery. Women find him hard to resist. He has used this gift often.”

“How did he meet her?”

“On a yacht in the Mediterranean. The voyage was arranged by people who did not know his true nature. He attached himself to her and won her love completely. She refuses to hear a word against him. The marriage is planned for next month.”

“Does she know of his past?” Holmes asked.

“He has told her,” Sir James said. “But he told it in such a way that he seems a victim of lies. She believes every word.”

Holmes looked thoughtful. “You speak of your client. Is it General de Merville?”

Sir James shifted in his chair. “No. The General is broken by this. The brave soldier has lost heart in this matter. My client is an old friend of the family. He wishes to remain unknown.”

Holmes shook his head. “Mystery at one end of a case is enough. At both ends it is confusing. I do not like to act without knowing who employs me.”

Sir James looked troubled. “I beg you, Mr. Holmes. The name must not be used. His motives are honourable. Your fee will be secure. Surely the name is not important?”

“I cannot promise to act,” Holmes said slowly. “But you may tell me all that you can.”

Sir James nodded. “The Baron lives at Vernon Lodge near Kingston. He is wealthy through doubtful business deals. He collects books, pictures, and Chinese pottery. He has even written a book on the subject. He is clever and careful.”

“A complex man,” Holmes murmured. “Many criminals are so.”

When Sir James left, Holmes sat long in silence. At last he turned to me.

“What do you think, Watson?”

“You should see the young lady,” I suggested.

“Her father has failed,” Holmes replied. “Why should I succeed? Still, if needed, we shall try. First, I must gather information. I shall speak to Shinwell Johnson.”

Johnson had once been a criminal but now served Holmes in secret. He moved easily among the darker parts of London and brought news that others could not find.

That evening Holmes met me at a restaurant in the Strand. “Johnson is at work,” he said. “We must search among the roots of crime for this man’s secrets.”

“If the lady knows his past and still loves him,” I said, “what use is more knowledge?”

Holmes smiled faintly. “A woman may forgive murder, yet turn from some smaller sin. We shall see.”

Then he told me that he had already visited Baron Gruner himself. He had sent in his card and been received at once.

“He is calm and polite,” Holmes said. “His voice is smooth. He warned me to leave the matter alone. He said I would fail and perhaps suffer harm. He even spoke of another agent who had been beaten in Paris after asking questions about him.”

“He threatened you?” I asked.

“Not directly,” Holmes answered. “But the meaning was clear.”

A few days later we met again. Holmes had arranged a visit to Miss de Merville. The girl who had once been the Baron’s lover, a woman named Kitty Winter, came with us. She hated him deeply and wished to ruin him.

We were shown into a large room in Berkeley Square. Miss de Merville was pale and beautiful, like a figure carved from snow. She spoke calmly and coldly. She said she loved the Baron and would not listen to slander.

Holmes tried to warn her. He spoke of shame, fear, and sorrow that might come after marriage. She listened without change of face.

Then Kitty Winter burst out in anger. She cried that she had been the Baron’s mistress and that he had ruined many women. She warned Miss de Merville that death might come from him. The young lady remained unmoved and ordered us

to leave.

Outside, Kitty shook with rage. Holmes was quiet but troubled.

“We must find another way,” he said. “This move has failed.”

It was two days later that the blow fell. I stood near Charing Cross when I saw a newspaper with bold words: “Murderous Attack upon Sherlock Holmes.”

My heart stopped. I rushed to Baker Street at once. Holmes had been beaten in Regent Street by two men with sticks. He lay in bed with his head bandaged.

“Do not look so alarmed, Watson,” he whispered. “It is not as bad as it seems. Spread the word that I am near death. Exaggerate it. Let them think I will not recover.”

“It was Gruner,” I said fiercely.

“Most likely,” Holmes answered. “But we must play a careful game.”

Thus began the next stage of our struggle with Baron Gruner.

Part 2

For six days the newspapers said that Holmes was close to death. Each morning I went to Baker Street and found him stronger than before, though he lay still and spoke in a weak voice when anyone else was near. He wished the world to believe that he was helpless. “They must feel safe,” he said to me. “Only then will they lower their guard.” He also told me to make sure that Kitty Winter was hidden in a quiet place, for he feared that the same men might try to harm her. I arranged this with Johnson at once.

On the seventh day Holmes sat up in his chair, though the papers still spoke of danger. That evening there was news that Baron Gruner planned to sail to America within three days. Holmes read the notice with sharp attention. “He wishes to leave England before we can strike,” he said. “He thinks I am broken. We must move quickly.”

Then he gave me a strange order. “Watson,” he said, “you must spend the next day learning all that you can about Chinese pottery.” I asked no questions. I went to the London Library and brought back books. All night and most of the next day

I read about marks, dates, shapes, and colors. I learned the names of old rulers and the signs they used on fine china. My head was full of it when I returned to Holmes.

He sat with his bandaged head resting on his hand. "Good," he said softly. "You will need that knowledge. Now take this." From a small box he brought out a little blue saucer wrapped in silk. It was thin and light, with a deep blue shine. "This is real Ming china," he said. "Very rare. You will take it to the Baron. You will call yourself Dr. Hill Barton. You are a doctor who collects china. You have a full set of these pieces and wish to sell. You have heard that he is an expert."

"And if he asks the price?" I said.

"You will say that an expert may value it. You are not sure of the exact price. You simply offer him the first chance." Holmes then wrote a short letter to the Baron, saying that I would call that evening. A messenger carried it at once.

When night came I dressed carefully and went to Vernon Lodge. The house stood in large grounds. A long drive led to a wide space before the door. The house was large and heavy, with tall corners and many windows. A serious-looking servant led me inside and then to a room where the Baron waited.

He stood near a glass case filled with fine china. He held a small vase and smiled when he saw me. "Pray sit down, doctor," he said in a soft voice. "You bring something of interest, I hope."

I unwrapped the saucer and gave it to him. He sat at his desk and pulled the lamp closer. The light fell on his face. He was indeed handsome, with dark eyes and black hair. Yet his mouth was thin and hard. As he studied the saucer he spoke quietly of its color and age. He praised it highly.

Then he looked at me with sudden sharp eyes. "You say you have a full set," he said. "Strange that I have not heard of such a treasure. Where did you obtain it?"

"Does that matter?" I replied with calm. "You can see that it is real. I am ready for it to be valued by an expert."

"Suppose you had no right to sell?" he asked.

"I give my word," I said. "My bank would support me."

He leaned back and watched me closely. "You are a collector, yet you have not

read my book on the subject?" he said.

"I have been busy," I answered.

His eyes grew cold. "This becomes curious," he said slowly. "You know little for a man who claims to collect such pieces. Tell me, what do you know of the old Northern Wei period?" He named other matters that I could not answer.

I rose as if offended. "Sir, I came to offer you a chance. I did not come to be tested like a schoolboy."

At that his manner changed at once. The softness left him. His face grew hard. "You are no collector," he said. "You are sent by Holmes. He is dying, I hear, so he sends others. What is your game?" He sprang up and moved toward a drawer in his desk.

At that moment he stopped and listened. I heard nothing, yet he seemed to catch some sound. With a quick cry he rushed into the small room behind his desk. I followed to the doorway. The window in that inner room was open to the garden. There, framed in the dark space, stood Sherlock Holmes.

His head was wrapped in white bandages. His face was pale as death. For a second he and the Baron faced each other. Then Holmes leapt through the window into the bushes below. The Baron rushed after him with a shout.

What happened next was quick as lightning. From the dark bushes a woman's arm shot out. There was a sharp splash and a terrible cry. The Baron clutched his face and ran back into the room, screaming. "Water!" he cried. "For God's sake, water!"

I seized a jug and poured water over his face. The skin was already burned and twisted. The beautiful features were ruined in seconds. One eye had turned white. The other was red and wild. Servants rushed in, shocked and frightened. The Baron rolled on the floor in pain.

"It was Kitty Winter!" he screamed. "She shall pay for this!"

I did what I could to ease him until other doctors arrived. He clung to me, begging for help. I felt no pity for the man, yet I did my duty. Soon the police came. I gave my true name and explained what I had seen. Then I left that house and hurried back to Baker Street.

Holmes sat waiting, tired but alert. When I told him of the Baron's face he closed his eyes for a moment. "The wages of sin," he said quietly. "Yet that alone will not stop the marriage. She would love him even more as a wounded man. We must strike at his character."

He then showed me a brown leather book on the table. "This is his record," he said. "A book of women he has used and cast aside. Names, pictures, details. When the girl spoke of it, I knew it was the key. While you held him in talk, I slipped into the inner room and took it from the desk."

Sir James Damery arrived soon after. Holmes explained all that had happened. Sir James was shaken by the news of the attack but listened closely when Holmes spoke of the book.

"Surely this injury is enough," Sir James said. "Must we use that dreadful book?"

"Yes," Holmes answered firmly. "She will forgive a scar. She will not forgive the truth written by his own hand."

Sir James took the book and the saucer and left at once. I went with him to the door. As he stepped into his carriage I caught a glimpse of the family crest on the panel before he covered it. I returned upstairs, eager to share my guess of our secret client.

"Holmes," I cried, "I know who he is!"

Holmes raised his hand with a faint smile. "He is a loyal friend and a noble gentleman," he said. "That is enough."

I do not know how the book was shown to Miss de Merville. Perhaps her father spoke to her. Perhaps Sir James did. But the result was clear. Three days later the newspapers announced that the marriage would not take place.

Kitty Winter was brought before the court for the acid attack. Many facts came out about the Baron's life, and her punishment was light. There was some talk of charging Holmes with breaking into the house, but nothing came of it. When the purpose is just and the friend is powerful, the law can show mercy.

Thus ended the case of the Illustrious Client.

The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier

Part 1

I do not often write my own cases. My friend Watson has done that work for many years. He has sometimes complained that I do not praise his skill enough. I have replied that he often cares more for drama than for exact detail. Now that I take the pen myself, I see that it is not easy to make a plain account both true and interesting. Still, I shall try. This case is one of the strangest that ever came to me, and since Watson was not present, it must be told in my own words.

It was in January of 1903, soon after the war in South Africa had ended. Watson had married and was no longer living with me in Baker Street. I was alone when Mr. James M. Dodd was shown into my room. He was a tall, strong man with a face darkened by sun and wind. He looked healthy and direct, yet troubled.

As is my habit, I placed him in the chair facing the light while I sat with my back to the window. He seemed unsure how to begin. I gave him time, and in that silence I studied him.

“You have just returned from South Africa,” I said.

He looked surprised. “Yes, sir.”

“Imperial Yeomanry.”

“That is right.”

“Middlesex Corps.”

He stared at me. “You are quite correct, Mr. Holmes.”

I smiled slightly. “Your skin shows the African sun. You carry your handkerchief in your sleeve, which is common among soldiers in the field. You wear a short beard, which suggests you were not a regular officer. Your card tells me you are a stockbroker from Throgmorton Street. The Middlesex Corps would be a natural choice.”

He gave a short laugh, though his eyes were serious. “I see that nothing escapes you. But I did not come to test your powers. Something very strange has happened at Tuxbury Old Park.”

“So I gathered from your letter,” I replied. “What has occurred there?”

He leaned forward, his strong hands gripping his knees. "It concerns my closest friend, Godfrey Emsworth. We served together in South Africa. He is the only son of Colonel Emsworth, a man who won the Victoria Cross in the Crimean War. Godfrey was brave, cheerful, and loyal. We shared everything in that year of fighting."

His voice softened as he spoke of his friend. "He was wounded near Pretoria by a large bullet. I received one letter from the hospital in Cape Town and another from Southampton when he returned home. After that, nothing. Not a single word for six months."

"Did you write to him?" I asked.

"Many times. No answer. At last I wrote to his father. I received a short reply. Godfrey, I was told, had gone on a voyage around the world and would not return for a year."

"And you did not believe it?"

"No, Mr. Holmes. It did not sound like him. He would not cut off a friend without a word. Besides, I knew that he and his father did not always agree. The Colonel is a hard man. I feared something was wrong."

He paused, then went on. "My own business kept me busy after the war. But this week I was free. I decided to go to Tuxbury Old Park myself. I wrote to Mrs. Emsworth and asked whether I might visit. She replied kindly and invited me to stay one night."

"And you went?"

"On Monday. The house stands alone, five miles from the nearest station. There was no carriage waiting, so I walked in the cold evening air. The place is large and old, set in wide grounds. It has an air of silence."

He drew a slow breath. "Mrs. Emsworth received me warmly. She looked worried and tired, but she welcomed me as her son's friend. The Colonel, however, was stiff and distant. He did not seem pleased to see me."

"Did you ask about Godfrey?" I said.

"At once. Mrs. Emsworth said that her son was traveling and that they had few letters from him. The Colonel repeated the same story in a harsh tone. Yet I felt

that they were hiding something. Their eyes did not meet mine when they spoke.”

He shifted in his chair. “After dinner I walked alone in the grounds. The house has many windows, and as I passed along one wall I saw a light in a small upper room. I stopped. For a moment I thought I saw a face at the window. It was pale, very pale, almost white. It vanished at once.”

“You are certain?” I asked quietly.

“Certain. It was Godfrey. I would know his face anywhere. But it was changed. The skin looked strange, like wax.”

“What did you do?”

“I hurried back inside. I found the Colonel in the hall. I told him what I had seen. His face grew dark with anger. He said I was mistaken. Godfrey was far away at sea.”

“And you insisted?”

“Yes. I said I had seen my friend. The Colonel lost control. He ordered me to leave the house at once. Mrs. Emsworth wept, but she did not oppose him. I was sent away like a stranger.”

His jaw tightened as he spoke. “I left, but I did not go far. I hid in the park and watched the house. Later that night I saw a servant carry food to the small building at the edge of the grounds. It is an old lodge, apart from the main house.”

“Did you approach it?” I asked.

“No. I feared to be caught. But I am certain that someone lives there in secret. And I believe that someone is Godfrey.”

He looked at me with deep concern. “Mr. Holmes, I beg you to help me. If my friend is ill, why hide him? If he is in trouble, why deny his presence? I cannot rest until I know the truth.”

I leaned back and considered his words. The case had elements of fear, secrecy, and strong emotion. The Colonel’s anger, the mother’s tears, the pale face at the window—all suggested something unusual.

“You have done well to come to me,” I said at last. “There may be a simple explanation, but we shall not assume it. I must see Tuxbury Old Park for myself.”

His eyes brightened with hope. “You will come?”

“At once,” I replied. “But before we go, tell me one thing. When you saw your friend’s face, did you notice any mark or sign besides the paleness?”

He thought carefully. “Yes. The skin looked uneven, almost spotted. And his expression was one of fear.”

That detail fixed my interest. A pale, spotted face, hidden in a small room apart from the world. I rose and took my hat.

“We leave within the hour,” I said. “Until we know more, we must consider every possibility. If your friend is in danger, we shall not delay.”

Thus began the affair of the Blanched Soldier.

Part 2

We took the next train to the small station nearest to Tuxbury Old Park. The winter air was cold and still. Mr. Dodd spoke little during the journey. His strong face showed both hope and fear. I did not press him with questions, for I had already formed several lines of thought and wished to test them quietly.

When we reached the station, there was again no carriage from the house. We walked along the narrow road through bare trees and fields covered with frost. At last the dark shape of the old house appeared beyond a wide stretch of lawn. It stood heavy and silent against the grey sky.

We rang at the door. A servant admitted us with surprise. I sent in my card. After some delay Colonel Emsworth entered the hall. He was a tall, stern man with white hair and a soldier’s bearing. His eyes were sharp and distrustful.

“What is the meaning of this?” he demanded. “Mr. Dodd, I told you plainly that my son is abroad.”

“Colonel,” I said calmly, “my name is Sherlock Holmes. I have come at Mr. Dodd’s request. We wish only to know the truth.”

The Colonel’s face hardened. “There is no truth beyond what I have told. My son is on a voyage. I will not have my household disturbed by foolish suspicions.”

“Then you will not object,” I replied, “to our seeing every part of the house, so that we may satisfy ourselves and trouble you no more.”

He stared at me in silence. I could see that he was a man accustomed to command, not to be questioned. At last he said coldly, "You have no right here."

"If there is nothing to hide," I answered, "you will gain by ending these doubts. If there is something to hide, it will come to light in time."

His face flushed with anger. For a moment I thought he would order us out. Then a door behind him opened softly, and Mrs. Emsworth appeared. She was pale and anxious, yet there was kindness in her eyes.

"Please," she said in a low voice, "let them come in."

The Colonel hesitated, then stepped aside. We were shown into a sitting-room. I spoke gently to Mrs. Emsworth.

"Madam," I said, "I believe your son is within these grounds. If he is ill, we are his friends. We wish only to help."

At that her control broke. Tears filled her eyes. She pressed her hands together.

"Oh, Colonel," she cried, "we cannot go on like this. The strain is too great."

The Colonel's stern manner wavered. He turned away, then back again.

"Very well," he said at last in a harsh voice. "You shall know. But you must promise that what you see will not be spoken of outside these walls."

"If it concerns only private illness," I said, "you have my word."

He looked at me searchingly, then nodded. "Come."

We followed him through the house and out into the cold air. He led us across the lawn toward a small building at the edge of the grounds—the very lodge Mr. Dodd had seen. Smoke rose faintly from its chimney.

The Colonel paused at the door. "You must prepare yourselves," he said quietly. "My son has suffered greatly."

He opened the door and we entered a simple room warmed by a fire. In a chair near the window sat a young man wrapped in a blanket. His face was pale—unnaturally pale. The skin was blotched with white patches. His hair had fallen thin in places. Yet in the eyes I saw intelligence and shame.

"Godfrey!" cried Mr. Dodd, rushing forward.

The young man started and drew back in fear. "Do not come near me!" he said sharply. "For your own sake."

I stepped closer and examined him carefully. The white patches, the thinning hair, the nervous manner—all spoke clearly to me.

“You need not fear for your friend,” I said calmly. “This is not a deadly illness. It is leprosy in a mild form, but not the contagious type that spreads easily.”

Mr. Dodd stopped short, shocked. “Leprosy!” he repeated.

Godfrey lowered his head. “I caught it in South Africa,” he said in a low voice. “There were cases among the natives. I was treated at a hospital. The doctors said it might pass, but they were not certain. I could not risk returning to society. My father decided to hide me here.”

Mrs. Emsworth had followed us and now stood beside her son, her hand on his shoulder.

“We feared disgrace,” she said. “The word alone would destroy him. The Colonel wished to protect the family name.”

The Colonel stood stiffly, though his eyes were troubled. “I acted as I thought best,” he said. “I would not have my son pointed at as a monster.”

I nodded. “Your motives were understandable. But secrecy breeds suspicion. Mr. Dodd believed his friend had been wronged.”

Godfrey looked at his friend with deep feeling. “You should not have come,” he said. “It is better that people think I travel abroad.”

“Nonsense,” Mr. Dodd answered warmly. “You are my friend. I would stand by you whatever the illness.”

I examined Godfrey more closely. “The signs are slight,” I said. “And I believe the doctors in South Africa were correct. This form is not severe. With care and time, it may pass entirely.”

Hope flickered in Mrs. Emsworth’s eyes. “You truly believe that?”

“I do,” I replied. “But hiding here in fear will not cure him. Proper medical care and fresh air will serve him better.”

The Colonel drew a long breath. “Then there has been no danger to others?”

“Very little,” I answered. “Your son has been more prisoner than patient.”

Godfrey straightened slowly. “If that is so,” he said, “I will not remain hidden. I will face whatever comes.”

Mr. Dodd clasped his hand firmly, ignoring the warnings. "That is the spirit," he said.

The tension in the room eased. The terrible secret, once spoken, lost much of its power. The pale face at the window was no ghost, but a young man burdened by fear and shame.

Before we left, I spoke privately with the Colonel. "You are a brave man," I said, "but bravery on the battlefield differs from courage at home. Trust and truth are sometimes stronger than silence."

He bowed his head slightly. "Perhaps I have been too rigid," he admitted.

As we walked back toward the house, Mr. Dodd turned to me with gratitude.

"You have lifted a weight from all our hearts," he said.

"Not I," I replied. "The truth has done that."

Thus ended the strange affair of the Blanched Soldier. It was not a crime of evil intent, but a tragedy of fear and pride. Yet it shows how secrecy, even when meant to protect, can wound more deeply than the illness it hides.

The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone

Part 1

I have often said that it is easier for my friend Watson to write my cases than for me to do so myself. He enjoys the dramatic moment, the sudden cry, the sharp turn in events. I, on the other hand, see a case as a chain of facts. Still, since this adventure took place at a time when Watson was not living with me, I must set it down in my own hand.

The matter of the Mazarin Stone occurred in the spring of 1903. The stone was one of the most famous jewels in Europe. It had been part of the Crown treasures of France. During a period of political trouble, it disappeared. Soon after, word reached London that the jewel was in the hands of a criminal who planned to cut it into smaller pieces and sell them separately. Once cut, it would never be traced.

The Prime Minister himself came to Baker Street. He was pale and worried.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “if this stone is lost, it will cause a great scandal. The nation cannot afford such disgrace.”

I assured him that I would do my best. I had already gathered some information. The jewel was believed to be in the possession of Count Sylvius, a foreign nobleman with a doubtful reputation. He lived in a large house in London and kept a small circle of dangerous friends. Among them was a man named Sam Merton, once a boxer, now a criminal of some skill.

I did not visit the Count at once. Instead, I made quiet inquiries. I learned that he seldom left his house and that he trusted very few people. He was clever and careful. If the stone was indeed in his possession, he would not keep it in an obvious place.

One afternoon I received a message that Count Sylvius would call upon me. I arranged my room carefully before he arrived. In my chair by the fire I placed a life-like wax figure of myself, dressed in my gown. It was seated so that from the doorway it would seem that I was there, reading.

When the Count entered, I watched him from behind a curtain. He was tall and thin, with sharp features and restless eyes. He paused when he saw the figure in the chair. For a moment he believed it to be me. Then, thinking himself unobserved, he stepped closer and drew a heavy stick from under his coat.

He struck the figure with sudden force. The wax head fell aside. At once I stepped from behind the curtain.

“Pray do not trouble yourself further,” I said quietly. “It is only a model.”

The Count turned pale, then forced a smile. “You startled me, Mr. Holmes. I feared I had disturbed you.”

“On the contrary,” I replied. “You have provided me with useful information.”

He sat down slowly, his eyes fixed on mine. “I came to discuss a misunderstanding,” he said. “You believe that I possess a certain jewel.”

“The Mazarin Stone,” I said calmly.

He spread his hands. “You are mistaken.”

“Possibly,” I answered. “Yet it is curious that the stone vanished and soon after you were seen in Paris in the company of certain men known for cutting gems.”

His expression hardened. "You have no proof."

"Not yet," I said.

There was a pause. I knew that the Count was weighing his options. He could not attack me openly. Nor could he admit anything. He rose at last.

"This conversation leads nowhere," he said coldly. "If you persist in your suspicions, you will regret it."

"I have heard such warnings before," I replied.

When he left, I followed him at a distance. He went directly home. That night I took up my position opposite his house. I knew that if he feared I was close to the truth, he might attempt to move the stone.

Late in the evening a light appeared in an upper window. I saw two shadows—Count Sylvius and Sam Merton. Their heads were close together as if in discussion. I could not hear their words, but I saw the Count open a small box and show its contents. Even at that distance I saw the faint flash of light from a jewel.

I returned to Baker Street and made my plans. The Count was too clever to keep the stone in a simple hiding place. He would carry it upon him or conceal it where no search would find it.

The next day I sent him a note requesting another interview. I wished him to believe that I was uncertain and that I needed further evidence. When he arrived, I spoke calmly.

"Count," I said, "this matter has gone far enough. I know that you possess the Mazarin Stone. If you surrender it now, the affair may be settled quietly."

He laughed softly. "You have imagination, Mr. Holmes. But imagination is not proof."

"Very well," I replied. "Then let us speak plainly. Your friend Sam Merton has a weak point. He is not loyal when frightened. If I speak to him alone—"

At that the Count's eyes flashed with anger. "You dare not!"

"On the contrary," I said. "I dare very much."

There was a knock at the door. It was Merton himself, brought in by my arrangement. I had sent a message suggesting that the Count meant to betray him and escape with the jewel alone.

Merton entered, heavy and suspicious. He looked from the Count to me.

“What’s this?” he demanded.

“Ask your noble friend,” I said quietly.

The Count sprang up. “Do not listen to him!” he cried.

But doubt had already entered Merton’s mind. He stepped closer to the Count.

“You said we were equal partners,” he growled. “Is that true?”

The Count hesitated. In that moment of silence I spoke again.

“The stone is not worth cutting,” I said. “It is too famous. You will be hunted across Europe. But if it is returned at once, there may be leniency.”

The room was tense. I watched closely. The Count’s hand moved toward his coat. For a second I thought he might draw a weapon. Instead he reached inside and slowly brought out a small leather case.

He opened it. There lay the Mazarin Stone, shining with cold fire.

“You win this round, Mr. Holmes,” he said bitterly.

I stepped forward and took the jewel. “I win nothing,” I answered. “I merely restore what was stolen.”

Thus the famous stone was saved from being cut and lost forever. The Prime Minister expressed deep relief. Count Sylvius and Sam Merton faced justice, though in different ways.

The matter may lack the violence of some of my adventures, yet it required care and patience. It also proved once more that fear and distrust can break even the closest criminal partnership.

Part 2

When the Count placed the leather case upon my table, the air in the room seemed to change. The struggle of wills was over. Sam Merton stared at the stone with wide eyes. He had not expected the matter to end so quickly. I closed the case and put it in my pocket.

“It is better so,” I said. “You have been wise at last.”

Count Sylvius gave a thin smile. “Wise?” he replied. “No, Mr. Holmes. Merely

practical. You had already set one trap for me. I see now that you would not rest until you had the jewel.”

“That is correct,” I answered calmly.

Merton looked from one to the other of us. “So that’s it?” he said. “We just hand it over?”

“You may prefer to resist,” I said quietly. “But the police are already aware of certain facts. If you choose violence, it will not serve you.”

That was not entirely true, but it was near enough to the truth to have weight. The Count understood this. He placed a hand on Merton’s arm.

“We shall do nothing foolish,” he said. “Mr. Holmes has shown that he is prepared.”

I walked to the door and opened it. Inspector Lestrade, who had been waiting in the next room, stepped inside. He had followed my instructions with care. His presence ended any last thought of resistance.

“Count Sylvius,” said Lestrade formally, “I must ask you to come with me.”

The Count bowed slightly. “You have won, Mr. Holmes,” he said again. “For the moment.”

“There will be no other moment,” I replied.

The two men were taken away without further trouble. When the door closed, I allowed myself a brief pause. The case had been short, yet delicate. The stone had been saved before it could be cut into pieces. That was the main point.

Later that day I delivered the Mazarin Stone to its rightful keepers. The Prime Minister received it with visible relief.

“You have spared us great embarrassment,” he said. “The nation is in your debt.”

“I am glad to have been of service,” I answered.

When I returned to Baker Street, I reflected on the manner in which the affair had unfolded. The wax figure had played its part well. Without it, the Count might have struck me from behind. His attempt to attack what he thought was my unguarded form had shown me his true nature. It had also confirmed that he felt threatened.

The key, however, had been distrust. Criminal partners often believe that

loyalty will protect them. Yet fear is stronger than loyalty. When I suggested that each man might betray the other, doubt entered their minds. Once that doubt was present, their unity broke.

The Count had kept the jewel upon him, hidden inside his coat. I had suspected this. A man who trusts no one is unlikely to place such a treasure far from his own reach. The flash I saw through the window had told me that he still had it and had not yet cut it.

In truth, there had been risk. If the Count had chosen violence when he realized that I stood behind the curtain, the matter might have ended differently. Yet he was not a man who acted without calculation. He preferred schemes to open force.

I cannot deny that I felt a certain satisfaction. The Mazarin Stone was more than a jewel. It was a symbol of public trust. Its loss would have shaken confidence at a sensitive time. That it was saved without bloodshed was fortunate.

A few days later I learned that Sam Merton had spoken freely once separated from the Count. He admitted their plan to sell the stone in parts abroad. Count Sylvius maintained his calm manner to the end, but the evidence was clear enough.

As for myself, I returned to my usual work. The wax figure remained in its place for some time. It had served well and might serve again. There are moments when a false image can protect the true man.

When I look back on this case, I do not see dramatic struggle or violent chase. I see instead the quiet battle of minds. The Count believed himself clever and cautious. He was both. But he made one error. He assumed that others would fear him as he feared exposure. That assumption gave me the opening I required.

Thus ended the affair of the Mazarin Stone. It was a reminder that crime, however bold, depends upon human weakness. And human weakness, when carefully observed, can be turned against itself.

The Adventure of the Three Gables

Part 1

The case of the Three Gables came to me during a period when I had already faced many dangerous men. Yet I must admit that few visitors ever entered my rooms in Baker Street with more sudden force than the one who began this affair.

It was in the spring of 1903. I was seated at my table with papers before me when the door was thrown open without ceremony. A huge black man stood there. He was broad in the shoulders, with heavy hands and a face set in anger. His clothes were well cut, but there was nothing gentle in his manner.

“Which of you is Holmes?” he demanded in a loud voice.

“I am,” I replied calmly.

He stepped forward and pointed a thick finger at me. “Keep your nose out of other people’s business,” he said. “You understand?”

“I do not recall asking your advice,” I answered.

His eyes flashed. “You’ve been making inquiries. You’ve been asking questions about a house in Harrow. Leave it alone.”

“Indeed?” I said. “And if I do not?”

He bent toward me, his face close. “You’ll be sorry.”

I did not rise. I merely looked at him with steady attention. I observed the scar on his cheek, the gold ring on his finger, and the small tattoo on his wrist.

“You are known as Steve Dixie,” I said quietly. “You have worked as a prize fighter. You have also served time in prison.”

He started, surprised. “You think you know a lot,” he growled.

“Enough,” I replied.

He glared at me for another moment, then turned and left the room, slamming the door behind him.

It was not long before I received the explanation for his visit. A lady was announced. She entered with a timid air. She was middle-aged, plainly dressed, and showed signs of worry.

“My name is Mrs. Mary Maberley,” she said. “I live at Three Gables in Harrow. I believe I am in some trouble.”

I motioned her to sit. “Pray tell me what has occurred.”

She clasped her hands tightly. “A man called upon me,” she said. “He offered

to buy my house, with everything in it. He said he would pay well. I refused.”

“Did he give a reason for wanting the house?” I asked.

“No. He would not explain. When I still refused, he became rude. Later I learned that others had made inquiries about the property. It is as if someone wishes to force me to leave.”

“How long have you lived there?” I asked.

“Only a short time,” she replied. “My son Douglas returned from abroad last year. He was ill and died soon after. The house contains his things. I cannot bear to part with them.”

I watched her closely. “Your son had traveled widely?”

“Yes. He had lived in Rome for some time.”

That detail fixed my attention. “And since his death, have you discovered anything unusual among his possessions?”

She hesitated. “There are papers. A manuscript of a novel he had written. I have not read it fully.”

“Has anyone else shown interest in those papers?”

“Not that I know of,” she answered.

I considered the matter. A sudden desire to buy a house and all its contents suggested that something specific was sought. The visit from the large man earlier confirmed that my inquiries had disturbed someone.

“Mrs. Maberley,” I said, “you must tell me exactly what was said when the offer was made.”

She described the visitor as a man with a polite manner but cold eyes. He had named a high price and had insisted that the sale include every object within the house, even personal letters and papers.

“That is strange,” I said. “Very strange indeed.”

I promised to visit Three Gables at once. The house stood in a quiet road, with a garden at the front and tall trees behind. It was large and somewhat old-fashioned, with three gables rising above the roof.

Mrs. Maberley showed me through the rooms. Everything appeared in order. The furniture was modest. The rooms upstairs were unused except for one, which

had belonged to her son.

We entered that room together. It contained books, papers, and personal items. On a table lay the manuscript she had mentioned. I glanced through the pages. It was a story of life in Rome, with scenes that suggested knowledge of private affairs among certain well-known persons.

“Did your son have friends in Rome?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said. “He moved in society there.”

I nodded slowly. It was possible that the manuscript contained references to someone who wished them suppressed.

“Has anything been stolen?” I asked.

“Not yet,” she answered.

As if to contradict her words, we heard a noise below. I hurried downstairs. A window at the back stood open. Footprints marked the soil outside.

“We are too late,” I said quietly. “Someone has already attempted entry.”

Mrs. Maberley grew pale. “What shall I do?”

“You shall do nothing,” I replied. “Leave the matter to me.”

I returned to Baker Street and reviewed the facts. A manuscript written by a young man who had lived in Rome. A sudden effort to buy his mother’s house and possessions. A threat delivered by a known criminal.

There was only one reasonable explanation. The manuscript contained material that could damage a person of importance. That person had employed agents to recover or destroy it.

The next morning I received confirmation of this theory. A second visitor arrived, more polished in manner than the first. He introduced himself as Mr. Isadore Klein.

“I represent a lady of high position,” he said smoothly. “She desires to obtain certain papers belonging to the late Mr. Douglas Maberley. She is prepared to pay generously.”

“What papers?” I asked.

“A manuscript,” he replied.

“Why does she wish it?” I said.

He smiled faintly. "It concerns private matters. Surely you understand discretion."

"I understand," I said, "that threats and forced purchases are not acceptable methods."

His eyes hardened. "My client is determined."

"So am I," I answered.

He rose. "Then you must bear the consequences."

When he left, I felt certain that the matter would not end quietly. I sent a note to Mrs. Maberley advising her to be cautious and to secure the manuscript.

That night, events proved my fears correct. The house at Three Gables was broken into. Furniture was overturned. The room of the dead son was searched. Mrs. Maberley was struck and left unconscious.

The manuscript was gone.

When I reached the house the next morning, I found her shaken but alive. The police had taken note of the damage but had no suspects.

I examined the room carefully. Though many objects had been disturbed, I observed that a particular drawer had been emptied with care. It had contained the manuscript.

"They knew exactly what they wanted," I said.

Mrs. Maberley looked at me with despair. "Then it is lost?"

"Not yet," I replied. "Those who stole it believe themselves safe. That belief may undo them."

Thus the affair of the Three Gables entered its final stage.

Part 2

I returned at once to Baker Street and set my plans in motion. The theft had been direct and violent. That told me two things. First, the lady behind the affair was desperate. Second, she trusted her agents to act quickly and without subtlety.

I called upon Inspector Lestrade and gave him the names of Steve Dixie and Isadore Klein. "You may not yet have proof," I said, "but you have reason to

question them closely.”

Meanwhile I took another step. I wrote a short note to Mr. Klein, requesting a private meeting. I suggested that I was prepared to discuss terms. If he believed that I had changed my position, he might reveal more.

He came that same afternoon. His smooth manner had returned.

“You have reconsidered?” he asked.

“I have considered the interests of my client,” I replied. “You have what you sought. The manuscript. Yet you have left damage behind. My client demands compensation.”

He smiled slightly. “That can be arranged.”

“Before we speak of money,” I said, “I must ask whether your employer has read the manuscript.”

His expression flickered for a moment. “That is her concern.”

“Indeed,” I said. “And if I were to tell her that I have retained a copy?”

That was not entirely true. I had no copy. But I had read enough of the manuscript to recall certain key passages. I had memorized names and details.

Klein leaned forward. “You would not dare,” he said quietly.

“On the contrary,” I replied. “I dare very much. The manuscript contains scenes of private life in Rome. It suggests a scandal involving a person of high rank. If it were published, the damage would be severe.”

He was silent. I continued calmly.

“Your employer has committed a crime. Assault and burglary. If she wishes to avoid public exposure, she must agree to my terms.”

“And those are?” he asked carefully.

“First, full payment for the damage done to Mrs. Maberley’s house. Second, a written statement admitting that the theft was carried out under her direction. Third, the return of the manuscript.”

His face grew cold. “You press too far.”

“I press exactly as far as needed,” I answered.

There was a long pause. At last he spoke. “I must consult my employer.”

“You may do so,” I said. “But do not delay.”

That evening I received a message requesting that I call at a certain address. I went alone. The house was elegant, with signs of wealth and taste.

I was shown into a drawing-room where a lady awaited me. She was beautiful and proud. Her eyes were dark and strong.

“You have placed me in a difficult position, Mr. Holmes,” she said.

“You placed yourself there,” I replied.

She rose and walked slowly across the room. “The manuscript was written by a foolish young man,” she said. “It contains lies.”

“It contains enough truth to be dangerous,” I answered.

She stopped and faced me. “He had no right to describe my life.”

“He had no right,” I agreed. “Yet you had no right to break into his mother’s house.”

She flushed slightly. “I sought only to protect my name.”

“Then you must now protect it wisely,” I said.

She studied me for several moments. Then she spoke with sudden firmness.

“You will have your compensation. The manuscript will be returned. But you will give me your word that no copy exists.”

“You have my word,” I replied.

The next day the manuscript was delivered to Baker Street. Along with it came a sum sufficient to repair all damage and provide comfort to Mrs. Maberley.

I returned the manuscript to her personally. She wept with relief.

“My son’s work is safe,” she said softly.

“It is safe,” I answered. “But I advise you to keep it under careful guard.”

As for Steve Dixie, he was arrested soon after on another charge. His connection to the burglary strengthened the case against him. Klein faded from sight. The lady of high position remained untouched by law, though not untouched by fear.

The affair ended without further violence. Yet it left me with reflection. Pride and reputation can drive even those of high standing to desperate acts. The young man who wrote the manuscript had perhaps been unwise. But the response to his words had been far worse.

Thus concluded the matter of the Three Gables. It showed once more that crime does not belong only to the low and rough. It may also hide behind fine doors and soft voices. And when it does, it must be met with firmness, not fear.

The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

Part 1

It was in the summer of 1903 that a man came to us in great trouble of mind. His name was Mr. Robert Ferguson, and he lived in Sussex. He was a tall, strong man with a healthy face, yet on that day he looked worn and afraid. He held his hat tightly in his hands as he stood before Holmes.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said in a low voice, “I fear that something evil has entered my house. I do not know what to think, and I do not dare to speak of it to others.”

Holmes leaned back in his chair and watched him closely. “Pray sit down, Mr. Ferguson,” he said calmly. “You will feel better when you have told your story.”

The man sat, but he did not at once begin. He looked from Holmes to me and then back again. “It concerns my wife,” he said at last. “She is from Peru. She is kind and gentle. I love her deeply. But I have seen something that I cannot explain.”

Holmes gave no sign of surprise. “Go on,” he said.

“We have a baby,” Mr. Ferguson continued. “A fine little boy. He is only a few months old. My wife cares for him day and night. She loves him with all her heart. There is also my son from my first marriage. He is older. He is strong in body but not strong in spirit. He has always been jealous of the baby.”

He paused and passed a hand over his face. “Two days ago I entered the nursery without warning. My wife stood over the baby’s cradle. Her head was bent low. When she looked up, I saw blood upon her lips. The baby lay still in the cradle. I believed that she had bitten him.”

I felt a chill at his words, but Holmes did not move.

“What did you do?” Holmes asked quietly.

“I cried out in horror,” said Ferguson. “She gave a strange cry and ran from the

room. I lifted the baby. There was a small wound on his neck. It was bleeding. I called the nurse. We cared for the child. He did not die. But since that moment I cannot find peace.”

“Did you question your wife?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” said the man. “She denied nothing. She only looked at me with pain in her eyes and said that I must trust her. She would give no explanation.”

Holmes folded his hands. “Have you ever known her to show cruelty?”

“Never,” Ferguson answered at once. “She is tender and good. Yet I saw the blood.”

“And your older son?” Holmes said.

“He was in the house,” Ferguson replied. “He is often quiet and keeps to himself. He has shown dislike for the baby.”

Holmes was silent for some moments. “You have told no one else?” he asked.

“No,” said Ferguson. “I could not speak of such a thing. People would say she is a vampire. There are old stories in her country. I do not believe in such tales. Yet what I saw—”

He broke off and looked at Holmes in deep distress.

Holmes rose and walked to the window. “You have acted wisely in coming to me,” he said. “I do not believe in vampires. I do believe in facts. We shall come to Sussex at once.”

That same afternoon we traveled to Mr. Ferguson’s house. It stood among trees, quiet and peaceful. Nothing in its appearance suggested horror. Mrs. Ferguson met us in the hall. She was dark and beautiful, with large sad eyes. When she looked at Holmes, there was both fear and hope in her face.

“My husband has told you?” she asked softly.

“He has told me what he saw,” Holmes replied. “I am here to learn the truth.”

She pressed her hands together. “I have done no evil,” she said. “But I cannot explain. If I speak, I bring danger to another.”

Holmes looked at her with interest. “Danger to whom?”

She lowered her eyes and did not answer.

We were shown to the nursery. The baby lay asleep in his cradle. I examined

his neck. There was indeed a small wound, now healing. It was round and narrow, not like the mark of teeth.

Holmes bent close and studied it carefully. "This is not a bite," he said at last. "It is the mark of a sharp point."

Mr. Ferguson stared at him. "A sharp point?"

"Yes," Holmes answered. "Something small and pointed struck the child."

Mrs. Ferguson gave a sudden movement but said nothing.

Holmes turned to Mr. Ferguson. "Tell me about your older son."

"His name is Jack," said Ferguson. "He is strong but strange in manner. Since the baby was born he has grown silent and dark. He does not like his stepmother."

"May I see him?" Holmes asked.

The boy was brought into the room. He was about fifteen, with a heavy face and restless eyes. He looked at us with dislike.

"You have been in this nursery?" Holmes asked gently.

"Yes," the boy answered.

"Did you see the baby hurt?"

"No," he said quickly.

Holmes studied him. "You have been unhappy of late," he said.

The boy said nothing.

Holmes then asked to see the grounds. We walked outside. Near the house stood a small shed where Mr. Ferguson kept certain objects from his wife's country. Inside were strange weapons and tools from South America. Among them Holmes found a blowpipe and small darts.

He picked up one dart and held it to the light. Its tip was dark and sharp.

"These are used by natives in Peru," he said. "They are sometimes dipped in poison."

Mr. Ferguson looked alarmed. "You do not think—"

Holmes did not answer at once. He returned to the house and asked that the older boy be brought again to the nursery. The boy came unwillingly.

Holmes stood before him. "Jack," he said kindly, "did you use one of those darts?"

The boy's face turned pale. He trembled.

"I did not mean to kill him," he cried suddenly. "I only wanted to frighten her. I hate her. I hate the baby."

Mr. Ferguson gave a cry of shock. Mrs. Ferguson rushed forward and held the boy in her arms.

"My poor child," she said.

Holmes spoke firmly. "You see now," he said to Mr. Ferguson. "The dart struck the baby's neck. Your wife saw it at once. She knew the dart might carry poison. She bent over the child and sucked the wound to draw out the poison. That is why there was blood upon her lips."

Mr. Ferguson stood silent, his face filled with shame. "And I doubted her," he whispered.

Mrs. Ferguson looked at her husband with tears in her eyes. "I could not speak," she said softly. "If I told, I would bring ruin upon the boy."

Holmes nodded. "You chose to bear suspicion rather than accuse him. That was brave."

The boy began to weep. He clung to his stepmother.

"I am sorry," he said again and again.

Mr. Ferguson took his wife's hands. "Forgive me," he said. "I should have trusted you."

Thus the strange case was solved. There had been no vampire, only jealousy and fear. The mother's act had been one of love, not of evil. The wound healed, and peace returned to the house in Sussex.

The Adventure of the Three Garridebs

Part 1

The case of the Three Garridebs began with a name so strange that it caught even my attention at once. I have often said that small and unusual details can lead to large results. In this matter, a single name proved to be the key.

It was in 1903 that a gentleman was shown into my rooms in Baker Street. He was tall, thin, and nervous in manner. His clothes were of good quality, but he wore them carelessly. He introduced himself as Mr. John Garrideb.

“Mr. Holmes,” he began eagerly, “I have come to you on a matter of great importance. It concerns my fortune.”

Holmes motioned him to sit. “Pray explain,” he said.

“I am the only Garrideb in London,” the man said. “Indeed, I believe I am the only Garrideb in England. Some weeks ago I was approached by an American gentleman who claimed to have discovered that there are three Garridebs in existence. If these three can be brought together, a large sum of money will pass to them.”

Holmes raised an eyebrow. “That is unusual. And what is the source of this fortune?”

“A wealthy American named Alexander Hamilton Garrideb,” said our visitor. “He left a will stating that his estate should go to three men bearing the name Garrideb. If fewer than three are found, the fortune remains untouched.”

“And you are one of the three?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” said Mr. John Garrideb with pride. “The American, Mr. Nathan Garrideb, is the second. We must find a third.”

“And how much is the estate worth?” I asked.

“Several million dollars,” he replied.

Holmes folded his hands and regarded the man carefully. “How did this American discover you?” he asked.

“He searched records in England and found my name. He visited me personally. He explained the matter and asked for my help in locating another Garrideb.”

“And have you found one?” Holmes asked.

“Not yet,” said Mr. Garrideb. “But Mr. Nathan Garrideb is confident that a third exists somewhere in England. He has asked me to assist in the search.”

Holmes leaned back. “This is indeed curious. Has this American shown you the will?”

“He said it is in America,” replied the visitor. “He has given me his word.”

Holmes's eyes grew thoughtful. "Words are easily given," he said quietly.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. A second visitor entered—a short, energetic man with sharp features and bright eyes. He introduced himself as Mr. Nathan Garrideb from Kansas.

"Mr. Holmes," he said briskly, "I am glad to meet you. We need your help. My countryman left a fortune, but it can only be claimed if three Garridebs are alive and present. I have already found Mr. John Garrideb here. We must find the third."

Holmes observed him closely. "You seem very eager," he said.

"Would you not be eager for millions?" the American replied with a quick smile.

"Perhaps," said Holmes. "Yet I am curious why you should devote so much effort to helping others gain wealth."

The American laughed lightly. "A share of such a fortune is enough for all," he said. "Besides, it is a matter of family pride."

Holmes asked many questions. Where had the will been made? When had Alexander Hamilton Garrideb died? How had Nathan Garrideb first learned of John Garrideb's existence? The American answered smoothly, though sometimes with too much readiness.

After both men had left, Holmes turned to me.

"Watson," he said, "what do you think?"

"It sounds improbable," I replied. "Three men with such a rare name?"

Holmes nodded. "The rarity of the name is the key. It is so uncommon that the chance of three existing in one country is slight. Yet this American appears certain."

"Do you suspect fraud?" I asked.

"I suspect purpose," Holmes answered. "The American's eagerness is not for wealth shared among three. It is for something else."

He rose and took down a directory. "We shall verify certain facts. First, the existence of any Alexander Hamilton Garrideb in America. Second, the movements of this Mr. Nathan Garrideb."

Over the next two days Holmes made quiet inquiries. He sent a cable to Kansas. The reply came quickly. There was no record of any wealthy man by that name. Nor had such a will been registered.

Holmes smiled faintly. “The fortune does not exist,” he said. “Therefore the motive must lie elsewhere.”

We visited Mr. John Garrideb at his home in Little Ryder Street. He lived among collections of curiosities—old coins, strange objects, and rare books. He was a harmless and somewhat lonely man.

“Has Mr. Nathan Garrideb urged you to leave London?” Holmes asked casually.

“Yes,” said John Garrideb. “He believes the third Garrideb may be in Birmingham. He has suggested that I travel there with him.”

“And do you intend to go?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” the man replied. “If I do not, the fortune cannot be claimed.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened. “Do not go,” he said firmly.

“But why?” cried John Garrideb.

“Because,” Holmes said quietly, “the American’s purpose is not to unite three Garridebs. It is to remove you from your house.”

The man stared at him in confusion.

“From my house?”

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “Something in this house is of value to him. That is the true object of his scheme.”

John Garrideb looked around at his shelves of dusty objects. “But what?”

Holmes did not answer at once. He walked slowly about the room, examining the floor and the walls. At last he paused by a section of the floor near a cupboard.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “do you observe that the boards here have been disturbed?”

I bent down. The wood showed faint marks as if it had been lifted and replaced.

Holmes’s face grew intent. “The American wishes the house empty,” he said. “Then he will return.”

Thus the curious matter of the Three Garridebs began to reveal its true nature.

Part 2

Holmes asked Mr. John Garrideb to leave everything as it was and to make no

sign that he suspected anything. "If Mr. Nathan Garrideb urges you again to travel," he said, "you may agree. But you must inform me at once."

Two days later the message came. The American had pressed strongly for a journey to Birmingham. He claimed to have found the address of another Garrideb and insisted that John must go with him immediately.

Holmes smiled grimly when he heard this. "The trap is nearly set," he said. "Watson, we shall pay a visit to Little Ryder Street tonight."

That evening we concealed ourselves in a small back room of the house. John Garrideb had gone out, as arranged, leaving the house apparently empty. The lights were out, and the street was quiet.

Holmes sat motionless in the darkness. Hours passed. At last we heard the faint sound of a key in the front door.

A man entered softly. By the dim light from the street I recognized the figure of Nathan Garrideb. He moved with care, pausing to listen. Then he crossed the room and knelt at the spot where Holmes had noticed the disturbed boards.

From his pocket he drew tools and began to lift the floor quietly. Within minutes he had removed several boards. Beneath them lay a small cavity.

He reached inside and drew out a bundle wrapped in cloth. Even in the faint light I saw the dull shine of metal.

Holmes rose silently and stepped forward.

"Good evening, Mr. Evans," he said calmly.

The man started violently. He turned and reached for his coat, but Holmes was faster. He seized the man's wrist.

"No sudden moves," Holmes said quietly.

At that moment I switched on the light. The American's face was pale and twisted with anger. The smooth manner had vanished.

"You have made a mistake," he said sharply.

"On the contrary," Holmes replied. "Your name is not Garrideb. It is Evans. You were once convicted in Chicago for robbery. You escaped prison five years ago. You have been hiding in England since."

The man's eyes burned with hatred. "You have no proof," he said.

Holmes pointed to the bundle in his hand. “That will suffice,” he said.

The cloth had fallen aside, revealing old bank notes and coins.

“These,” Holmes continued, “were hidden by a former occupant of this house— Roger Presbury, a notorious criminal who was arrested years ago. He concealed his stolen money beneath this floor. You learned of it and devised the story of the three Garridebs in order to gain access.”

The man made a sudden movement and broke free. In the struggle that followed, he drew a small revolver and fired. The shot struck the wall close to Holmes’s head. I leaped forward, and together we forced him to the ground. Holmes twisted the revolver from his hand.

“You are reckless, Evans,” he said coldly.

The police, who had been waiting outside at Holmes’s request, rushed in at the sound of the shot. The man was seized and taken away, still protesting.

When all was quiet again, John Garrideb returned, pale and shaken.

“I cannot believe it,” he said. “All that talk of fortune—”

“There was no fortune,” Holmes replied gently. “Only greed.”

“And I would have left my home,” John said in a low voice. “He would have taken everything.”

“He needed only an empty house,” Holmes explained. “The rare name was a useful tool. He knew that if he could persuade you to travel, he would have time to search without interruption.”

John Garrideb looked around his room, filled with harmless collections and quiet objects.

“I am glad you came to me, Mr. Holmes,” he said.

Holmes nodded. “Your trust saved you.”

As we walked back to Baker Street, I could not hide my anger.

“That bullet came very close,” I said.

Holmes glanced at the mark on the wall where the shot had struck.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “Too close.”

He was silent for a moment, then added, “It is not the stone or the money that interests me in such cases, Watson. It is the way in which a man’s weakness can

be turned into a weapon. A rare name, a lonely collector, a story of shared fortune—that was all he needed.”

“And yet,” I said, “you saw through it.”

Holmes gave a faint smile. “The simplest lies often fail because they try too hard. If three Garridebs truly existed, they would have found one another long ago.”

Thus ended the affair of the Three Garridebs. It began with a strange name and ended with the exposure of a criminal who believed himself clever. But once more it showed that patience and observation are stronger than deception.

The Problem of Thor Bridge

Part 1

The case of Thor Bridge came to us in the year 1903, at a time when I had grown used to strange crimes and sudden danger. Yet even I felt a certain weight when I first heard the name of this affair. It was not only a crime. It was a matter of honor, jealousy, and careful thought.

One morning a tall and well-dressed gentleman was shown into our rooms in Baker Street. He introduced himself as Mr. Neil Gibson. His manner was proud and direct, and it was clear that he was a man of great wealth.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said at once, “my wife has been murdered. The police have arrested the woman whom I believe innocent. I want the truth.”

Holmes motioned him to sit. “Pray begin at the beginning,” he said calmly.

“I live at a place called Goldingham Hall in Hampshire,” said Mr. Gibson. “It is near a stone bridge known as Thor Bridge. My wife was found dead there three days ago. She had been shot through the head. A revolver lay beside her.”

I felt a chill at his words. “And who has been arrested?” I asked.

“Our children’s governess,” he replied. “Her name is Grace Dunbar.”

“Why has suspicion fallen upon her?” Holmes asked.

Mr. Gibson’s face tightened. “There was bad feeling between her and my wife.

My wife believed that Miss Dunbar was too friendly with me.”

“And was she?” Holmes asked quietly.

Mr. Gibson hesitated. “She was kind and intelligent. We spoke often. But there was nothing improper.”

Holmes watched him closely. “Go on,” he said.

“On the day of the crime,” Gibson continued, “my wife received a note asking her to meet someone at Thor Bridge. She left the house alone. Later, a servant found her body. Miss Dunbar was seen walking in the direction of the bridge around that time.”

“Was there any proof that she fired the shot?” Holmes asked.

“Only that she had once owned a revolver,” Gibson said. “It was missing.”

Holmes leaned back and folded his hands. “And what does Miss Dunbar say?”

“She denies everything,” said Gibson. “She admits that she met my wife at the bridge. She says they argued. Then she left. She claims that when she departed, my wife was alive.”

“And you believe her?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” Gibson said firmly. “She is incapable of murder.”

Holmes rose. “Then we must go to Hampshire.”

That afternoon we arrived at Goldingham Hall. It was a large house set among trees and fields. Mr. Gibson led us first to Thor Bridge.

It was an old stone bridge crossing a narrow stream. The water below was dark and slow. On the side of the bridge was a low parapet of stone. It was there that Mrs. Gibson’s body had been found.

Holmes examined the ground carefully. “Where was the body lying?” he asked.

Gibson pointed to a place near the parapet.

Holmes then asked to see the revolver. It had been recovered by the police and was kept at the house for inspection. He studied it with care.

“One shot fired,” he said quietly.

“Yes,” said Gibson.

Holmes next requested to see Miss Dunbar. She was brought to us under guard. She was pale but calm. Her eyes were clear.

“Miss Dunbar,” Holmes said gently, “tell me exactly what happened at the bridge.”

She took a steady breath. “Mrs. Gibson sent me a note asking me to meet her there. She accused me of seeking her husband’s affection. She was angry and bitter. I tried to calm her. At last I left her standing by the parapet. I swear she was alive when I walked away.”

“Did you have a revolver with you?” Holmes asked.

“No,” she answered firmly. “I have not seen mine for weeks. It was taken from my drawer.”

Holmes studied her face. “You have told the same story to the police?” he asked.

“Yes.”

After she was led away, Holmes stood silent for some time.

“There is something curious here,” he said at last.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“If Mrs. Gibson was shot by Miss Dunbar, why was the revolver left beside the body? A guilty person would take it away.”

“Unless she wished it to appear as suicide,” I suggested.

Holmes shook his head. “Then the revolver would have been placed more naturally. We must examine the bridge more closely.”

He returned to Thor Bridge and leaned over the parapet. His eyes narrowed.

“Watson,” he said softly, “observe the stone edge here. Do you see the small mark?”

I bent down. There was indeed a slight chip in the stone.

Holmes’s face grew intent. “And now consider this,” he continued. “If a person wished to shoot herself, she might lean over the parapet. But if she wished to create the appearance of murder, she might arrange matters differently.”

I did not yet understand.

Holmes straightened. “I must see the note that brought Mrs. Gibson to the bridge,” he said.

It was produced. The handwriting was that of Miss Dunbar. At least, so it appeared.

Holmes examined it with a lens. "A good imitation," he murmured. "But not perfect."

Mr. Gibson stared at him. "You believe the note was forged?"

"I believe," Holmes said slowly, "that Mrs. Gibson wrote it herself."

There was silence. "Why would she do that?" I asked.

Holmes looked toward the bridge. "Because she wished to trap Miss Dunbar. Or perhaps to destroy her."

Thus the dark puzzle of Thor Bridge began to take shape in Holmes's mind.

Part 2

Holmes returned to the house and asked for paper, ink, and a revolver of similar weight to the one found at the bridge. Mr. Gibson watched him in growing tension.

"What do you intend?" he asked.

"To test a theory," Holmes replied quietly.

We went again to Thor Bridge. The afternoon light lay pale upon the stone. Holmes stood where Mrs. Gibson had been found. He looked down at the dark water below.

"If a person wished to kill herself," he said, "and at the same time throw suspicion upon another, she would need to act with care. She would need to fire the shot, yet ensure that the weapon did not fall into the water."

"But how could that be done?" I asked.

Holmes tied a length of thin cord to the revolver. He then leaned over the parapet and held the weapon in the position of a person about to fire.

"Imagine," he said, "that the cord is attached to the trigger. The other end is fastened around the hand. After the shot, the weapon would fall. But the cord would prevent it from sinking. It would swing against the stone."

He released the revolver. It fell and struck the side of the bridge, leaving a small mark.

"Like the mark we saw," I said.

Holmes nodded. He then drew the revolver back up by the cord.

“The person could then remove the cord and place the weapon beside the body. It would appear that someone else had fired the shot.”

Mr. Gibson’s face had grown pale. “You mean that my wife—”

“I mean,” Holmes said gently, “that she may have taken her own life in such a way as to accuse Miss Dunbar.”

“But why?” Gibson cried.

Holmes looked at him steadily. “Because she believed that you cared for Miss Dunbar. She was jealous. The forged note proves planning. The mark upon the stone proves the fall of the weapon. The position of the body proves that no struggle took place.”

Gibson covered his face with his hands. “I never thought—”

“Jealousy can blind reason,” Holmes said quietly. “Your wife’s act was not only despair. It was revenge.”

“And Miss Dunbar?” I asked.

“Is innocent,” Holmes replied.

We returned to the house. Holmes asked to see the revolver once more. He showed Mr. Gibson the faint trace of fiber near the trigger guard.

“The cord has been removed,” he said. “But not without leaving a slight sign.”

Mr. Gibson stood in silence for some time. At last he spoke.

“This must be shown to the police.”

“It shall be,” Holmes answered.

That evening Inspector Barton of the local police arrived. Holmes explained his findings with calm precision. The inspector examined the mark upon the bridge and the revolver.

“It is possible,” he admitted slowly. “The evidence against Miss Dunbar was never complete.”

“Then it must be corrected,” Holmes said.

Within two days, Miss Dunbar was released. When she was brought to Mr. Gibson, her eyes were filled with tears.

“You are free,” he said softly.

“I am grateful,” she replied.

Holmes stood aside, allowing them their moment. There was no triumph in his face. Only a quiet sadness.

As we traveled back to London, I spoke.

“It is a tragic ending,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes answered. “Thor Bridge will stand as it always has. But those who pass it will not know the human sorrow that once lay upon its stones.”

“You feel sympathy for her?” I asked.

“For all of them,” Holmes said. “For the woman driven by jealousy. For the innocent girl accused. And for the husband who must live with the memory.”

He fell silent and looked out of the train window.

Thus ended the problem of Thor Bridge. It was not a murder in the common sense, but a planned act of self-destruction meant to harm another. Yet the truth, once found, brought justice to the innocent and peace to those who remained.

The Adventure of the Creeping Man

Part 1

It was late in the year 1903 when a case came to us that tested not only reason but also human nature. I remember it clearly, for it showed how far a man may go when fear of age and loss takes hold of him.

One afternoon a tall and anxious young man was shown into our rooms in Baker Street. His name was Mr. Trevor Bennett. His manner was troubled, and he spoke with urgency.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “I am secretary to Professor Presbury. I fear that something strange and terrible has come over him.”

Holmes motioned him to sit. “Professor Presbury of Camford University?” he asked.

“Yes,” Bennett replied. “He is a famous scholar. He is also a widower with a grown daughter. Recently he has announced his engagement to a much younger woman.”

Holmes's eyes showed interest. "That alone is not a crime," he said calmly.

"No," Bennett answered, "but since that time his behavior has changed. He has become secretive. He has begun to receive small packages from a man in London. He keeps them locked away."

"What kind of packages?" I asked.

"Small wooden boxes," Bennett said. "They arrive regularly. The Professor opens them in private."

"And his behavior?" Holmes asked.

Bennett hesitated. "It is difficult to describe. He has sudden bursts of anger. He moves quietly about the house at night. And our dog—Roy—once a faithful animal—has begun to growl and snap at him."

Holmes leaned forward slightly. "Animals are sensitive," he said. "Go on."

"Two nights ago," Bennett continued, "I saw something that frightened me deeply. I was awake late when I heard a noise outside my window. I looked out and saw the Professor moving across the lawn—not walking, but creeping—close to the ground."

"Creeping?" I repeated.

"Yes," Bennett said. "He moved with strange quick motions, almost like an animal. He then climbed up the ivy on the wall and entered his room through the window."

Holmes's face remained calm, but I saw that his mind was active.

"You are certain it was Professor Presbury?" he asked.

"Certain," Bennett replied.

"Has he been ill?" Holmes asked.

"He has seemed more energetic of late," Bennett said. "At times almost young in manner. Yet there are moments when he appears confused and wild."

Holmes stood and walked to the window. "You have told no one else?" he asked.

"Only the Professor's daughter," Bennett said. "She is frightened but unwilling to accuse her father of madness."

"We shall visit Camford at once," Holmes said.

That evening we arrived at the Professor's house. It was a large and respectable

home, set among trees. Professor Presbury himself received us in his study. He was a tall, thin man with sharp features and bright eyes.

“My secretary is foolish,” he said coldly when Bennett’s concerns were mentioned. “I am in full control of my faculties.”

Holmes regarded him carefully. “I have no wish to offend,” he said calmly. “But your secretary reports unusual behavior.”

“Nonsense,” the Professor replied sharply.

As he spoke, the dog outside began to bark loudly. It was a deep, angry sound.

“The animal has grown dangerous,” Presbury said with irritation. “I may have to have it destroyed.”

Holmes exchanged a glance with me. Later that night, at Bennett’s request, we remained in the house to observe.

Near midnight we heard soft movements in the corridor. Holmes opened the door quietly. The Professor was there. He did not walk upright. He moved in a crouched position, his hands touching the floor.

In the dim light his face seemed strained and eager. He did not see us. Instead he crept down the stairs and out into the garden.

We followed at a distance. Once again he crossed the lawn with unnatural quickness. He leaped lightly and seized the branch of a tree, climbing with surprising strength.

“Good heavens,” I whispered.

Holmes remained silent.

Suddenly the dog broke free and rushed toward the Professor, barking fiercely. The Professor turned with a wild cry and showed his teeth in a strange grimace. The dog snapped at him and bit his leg.

The Professor cried out in pain and fell to the ground.

Holmes ran forward and called for help. The Professor was carried inside and placed upon a couch.

When he regained full sense, Holmes spoke firmly.

“Professor,” he said, “you have been taking some substance to restore your youth.”

The Professor stared at him in shock. "You cannot know that," he said.

"I know that you have received packages from a foreign source," Holmes replied. "I know that your movements resemble those of an animal. I know that your dog senses a change in your nature."

The Professor covered his face. "I wished to regain my youth," he said in a broken voice. "My fiancée is young. I feared becoming old beside her."

"What have you taken?" Holmes asked.

"A preparation derived from the glands of a monkey," he confessed. "A man in London promised that it would renew my strength."

Holmes nodded slowly. "It has given you energy," he said. "But at a cost."

The Professor looked up with fear in his eyes.

"You are becoming less man and more beast," Holmes said quietly.

The room was silent.

Thus began the strange affair of the Creeping Man.

Part 2

The Professor lay back upon the couch, breathing heavily. The bite upon his leg had drawn blood, and his face was pale with both pain and shame. His daughter stood nearby, her hands clasped tightly, her eyes filled with fear and sorrow.

"Is it true?" she whispered. "Father, have you been taking this substance?"

He did not answer at once. Then slowly he nodded. "I wished to feel young again," he said in a low voice. "I feared that I was losing strength. I feared that I would seem foolish beside her."

Holmes spoke in a calm and steady tone. "You placed your trust in a man who promised what no honest science can give. The human body is not to be altered without consequence. What was the name of this man in London?"

The Professor hesitated. "He is a foreign doctor," he said. "He claimed to have studied the glands of animals. He told me that small injections would restore vigor."

"And did he warn you of danger?" Holmes asked.

"He said there might be changes of mood," the Professor admitted. "But

nothing more.”

Holmes shook his head slightly. “He used you as a test. The changes in your behavior—the creeping, the climbing, the sudden bursts of anger—these are signs that the substance has disturbed your natural balance.”

I looked at the Professor closely. Even now, there was something restless in his eyes, something sharp and watchful.

“Will it pass?” the daughter asked in a trembling voice.

“If the treatment is stopped at once,” Holmes said, “and if the body is allowed to recover, I believe the worst may be avoided. But you must never use it again.”

The Professor covered his face with his hands. “I have been a fool,” he said. “I nearly lost my reason. I frightened my own child.”

The dog, now tied outside, continued to growl softly. Holmes turned toward the sound.

“Animals are guided by instinct,” he said quietly. “The dog sensed a change in you. That is why it attacked. It did not recognize you fully as master.”

The Professor gave a weak smile. “Perhaps it was right,” he said bitterly.

Holmes stood and addressed him firmly. “You are a learned man. You have taught others to respect truth and reason. Yet you allowed vanity to guide you. You feared age more than you feared danger.”

The words were not harsh, but they were direct.

The Professor nodded slowly. “I will write to the man in London,” he said. “I will demand that he cease such practices.”

Holmes’s expression grew serious. “You may write, but do not expect honesty in reply. I shall make my own inquiries.”

Over the next few days, Holmes gathered information about the so-called doctor. It became clear that he had performed similar experiments elsewhere, always in secret, always with promises of youth and strength. The matter was placed in the hands of authorities, though such men are often careful to disappear when danger approaches.

As for Professor Presbury, he obeyed Holmes’s advice. The strange creeping movements ceased. The sudden anger faded. He grew calmer, though somewhat

weaker than before. The marks of pride remained upon him, but they were mixed now with humility.

One afternoon he visited Baker Street to thank Holmes personally.

“You have saved me from disgrace,” he said quietly. “I did not see how far I had fallen.”

Holmes inclined his head. “It is not disgrace to grow older,” he said. “It is only natural.”

The Professor looked thoughtful. “I believed that I could defeat time,” he said. “I see now that I cannot.”

“No man can,” Holmes replied. “But a wise man can accept it.”

After he had gone, I turned to Holmes.

“It was not a crime in the usual sense,” I said.

“No,” Holmes answered. “But it was a warning. The desire to escape age can drive even the intelligent into foolish acts. Science must serve truth, not vanity.”

He paused for a moment and then added quietly, “There is danger in every discovery. It depends upon the character of the man who uses it.”

Thus ended the strange affair of the Creeping Man. It began with secret injections and ended with a lesson in humility. No murder had taken place, no jewel had been stolen. Yet the threat had been real—the slow loss of a man’s reason in his struggle against nature itself.

The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane

Part 1

I must tell this story myself, for it took place at a time when my dear friend Watson was not beside me. After my retirement from London, I lived quietly upon the Sussex coast. I kept bees and enjoyed the sea air. Yet even in retirement, strange events sometimes found their way to me.

It was during the summer that this affair occurred. My house stood near a small bay where the sea broke gently upon the sand. Not far away was a private school

for boys. I knew the headmaster, Mr. Harold Stackhurst, a capable and thoughtful man.

One morning I was walking along the shore when I heard hurried footsteps behind me. I turned and saw Stackhurst running toward me, his face pale with alarm.

“Mr. Holmes!” he cried. “Come at once. Something terrible has happened.”

I followed him quickly along the path toward the beach. A small group of boys stood near the water, frightened and silent. On the sand lay the body of a young man.

I recognized him as Mr. Fitzroy McPherson, a teacher at the school. He was alive, but only just. His face was drawn with pain. His back was partly bare, and I saw upon it long red marks, raised and cruel in appearance.

I knelt beside him. “What has happened?” I asked.

He struggled to speak. His lips moved, and I bent close.

“The lion’s mane,” he whispered faintly.

Then his head fell back, and he died.

I rose slowly. The words were strange and troubling. The marks upon his back looked like lashes from a whip, yet no weapon lay near.

“He went swimming early this morning,” Stackhurst said in a shaken voice. “I was walking above the cliff when I saw him come from the water. He staggered and fell.”

“Was anyone else in the water?” I asked.

“No one,” he replied.

I examined the body carefully. The red marks were clear and painful to look upon. They curved and crossed one another in a pattern unlike ordinary injury.

“Was he known to have enemies?” I asked.

Stackhurst hesitated. “There was some tension,” he admitted. “McPherson was engaged to Miss Maud Bellamy, daughter of a local man. But another teacher, Mr. Ian Murdoch, also cared for her.”

“Where is Murdoch?” I asked.

“He has not been seen this morning,” Stackhurst answered.

That detail fixed my attention.

We carried the body to the school. I then walked back alone to the beach and studied the place where McPherson had left the water. The tide was low. The sea was calm and clear.

I removed my shoes and walked into the shallow water. I saw nothing unusual at first. The sand lay smooth beneath my feet.

Yet as I stood there, I noticed something drifting slowly just below the surface. It was faint and almost invisible. A long, pale mass, with trailing threads.

I stepped back at once.

“So,” I murmured, “the lion’s mane.”

I returned to shore and considered what I had seen. There is a creature of the sea known for its long, trailing tentacles. It is beautiful and deadly. It is called by fishermen the lion’s mane.

Later that day we found Mr. Ian Murdoch walking near the cliffs. His manner was troubled. When he learned of McPherson’s death, he seemed both shocked and distressed.

“You suspect me,” he said bitterly. “Because I cared for Maud.”

“I suspect no one,” I replied. “Tell me where you were this morning.”

“I was walking inland,” he said. “I had quarreled with McPherson yesterday. But I did not harm him.”

“What was the quarrel about?” I asked.

“About Maud,” he answered quietly.

His eyes were honest, though heavy with emotion.

I examined his hands and clothing. There was no sign of struggle, no trace of sand or water.

Meanwhile, the post-mortem examination showed that McPherson had not been struck by any weapon. The marks upon his back were burns, not cuts. His body showed signs of shock.

I returned to the sea at the next low tide. This time I approached carefully with a long stick. There, floating just below the surface, was the creature I had glimpsed before. It was large and pale, with long trailing threads that moved gently in the

water.

I touched one thread lightly with the stick. At once I saw how it clung and burned.

The lion's mane jellyfish.

I knew then what had happened.

McPherson had swum into its trailing tentacles. The poison had burned his skin, leaving those terrible red marks. The pain and shock had overcome him as he reached the shore.

But one question remained. Why had he spoken of the lion's mane as if it were something known to him?

That evening, I spoke with Stackhurst once more.

"Did McPherson often swim in that place?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "He knew the waters well."

"Then he must have recognized the danger," I said.

"Perhaps he saw it too late," Stackhurst replied sadly.

The sea gives little warning.

Thus the strange words spoken by the dying man found their explanation not in human hatred, but in the silent danger of the ocean itself.

Yet the case was not entirely finished, for another life would soon be touched by the same hidden threat.

Part 2

The following morning brought further proof of my conclusion. A boy from the school came running toward my cottage, breathless and frightened.

"Mr. Holmes," he cried, "Mr. Murdoch has been hurt! He was swimming near the same place!"

I hurried at once to the beach. A small crowd had gathered. Mr. Ian Murdoch lay upon the sand, pale but alive. His back and shoulders showed the same red, raised marks that I had seen upon McPherson.

"Keep him still," I ordered. "Do not touch the wounds with bare hands."

I knew that the tentacles of the lion's mane jellyfish could cling and continue to burn if handled carelessly. With care, we washed the marks with seawater and then applied such treatment as was known to ease the pain.

Murdoch was able to speak after some time.

"I felt something strike me in the water," he said weakly. "Like fire. I remembered what had happened to poor McPherson."

"You were fortunate," I said. "You reached the shore more quickly."

He closed his eyes in pain. "Then he did not kill himself?" he asked. "It was no act of despair?"

"No," I answered. "Nor was it murder. It was the sea."

The gathered boys looked at me with wide eyes.

I turned to Mr. Stackhurst. "The creature is still in the bay," I said. "It must be driven away or destroyed before more harm is done."

With the help of local fishermen, we located the jellyfish once more. It drifted not far from the place where McPherson had swum. Its long, pale body spread wide beneath the surface, and its trailing threads reached far in the water.

The fishermen used nets and poles to draw it carefully toward the shore. It was a difficult task, for even a light touch could bring pain. At last they dragged it onto the sand.

In the clear light of day, the creature's size was plain. Its body was broad and pale, like a floating cloud. From it hung many long threads, almost invisible unless closely observed.

"The lion's mane," I said quietly.

The men destroyed it with care, ensuring that no part remained to drift back into the water.

News of the true cause of McPherson's death spread quickly. Suspicion against Murdoch faded. The tension that had grown between him and the dead man was now seen in a different light. It had been only a quarrel of the heart, not a motive for crime.

Miss Maud Bellamy, pale and shaken, came to speak with me.

"I feared the worst," she said softly. "I feared that anger had led to blood."

“It was nature, not anger,” I replied. “The sea is beautiful, but it holds danger.”

She looked toward the water. “He spoke of the lion’s mane,” she said. “He must have known.”

“He saw the creature in his final moments,” I said. “He named his enemy, though it was no human foe.”

Later that day I walked alone along the cliff path. The sea lay calm and bright beneath the sun, as if nothing dark had occurred. Yet I knew how quickly peace can hide peril.

I reflected that even after years of dealing with crime, the world can still surprise one. Not every death is born of hatred or greed. Some come from the silent forces of nature.

When I returned to my bees that evening, the air was warm and gentle. The simple hum of the hive seemed a comfort after the sharp cries of the morning.

Thus ended the affair of the Lion’s Mane. It was not a murder to be solved, but a mystery of misunderstanding. A dying man’s strange words had pointed not to guilt, but to truth. And once again, careful observation had turned fear into knowledge.

The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger

Part 1

The case of the Veiled Lodger came to me during my later years, when I had already seen much of the darker side of human life. Yet even then, there were moments when I felt more pity than judgment.

One afternoon a respectable woman named Mrs. Merrilow came to Baker Street. She kept a small boarding house in South Brixton. Her manner was troubled.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “I have a lodger who is in great distress. She has lived in my house for many years. She never shows her face. She wears a thick veil at all times. Now she wishes to confess something terrible before she dies.”

Holmes leaned forward with interest. “Has she committed a crime?” he asked.

“She believes so,” Mrs. Merrilow replied. “She says she must tell the truth before the end.”

“And what is her name?” I asked.

“She calls herself Mrs. Ronder,” said the landlady. “But that is not her true name.”

Holmes rose at once. “We shall visit her,” he said.

That evening we entered the modest boarding house. Mrs. Merrilow led us upstairs to a small room. The curtains were drawn. A woman sat in a chair by the fire. She was wrapped in dark clothing, and a heavy black veil covered her face.

When she spoke, her voice was low but steady.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “you have come at last.”

“I am here,” Holmes replied gently. “You wished to speak.”

She lifted a trembling hand and slowly raised the veil.

I could not hide a start. Her face was terribly scarred. The flesh had been torn and healed in twisted lines. One eye was blind. The sight was painful to behold.

“You see why I hide,” she said quietly.

Holmes did not show shock. His expression was calm and kind.

“How did this occur?” he asked.

“A lion,” she replied. “Many years ago. I was once part of a traveling circus. My husband, Ronder, owned a trained lion. He was a cruel man. He beat the animal and beat me.”

She paused, her breath heavy.

“One night,” she continued, “we quarreled. I hated him. I feared him. The lion was restless in its cage. I opened the door.”

There was silence in the room.

“You opened it?” I said softly.

“Yes,” she answered. “I meant only to frighten him. But the lion sprang out. It attacked him first. He fell and died at once. Then it turned on me.”

She touched her scarred face.

“The beast was shot before it killed me. But I was left like this.”

Holmes listened without interruption.

“And what did the world believe?” he asked.

“They believed it was an accident,” she said. “That the lion had broken free. No one suspected me. But I have carried the truth in my heart for years. I opened the cage. I caused his death.”

Her voice trembled.

“Do you feel remorse?” Holmes asked quietly.

“Yes,” she said. “But I also remember his cruelty. He would have killed me one day. I do not know whether I am a murderer or only a victim.”

Holmes was silent for a long moment.

“Did you intend his death?” he asked at last.

“No,” she said firmly. “I wished only to frighten him.”

“Then you did not commit murder,” Holmes replied calmly. “You acted in anger and fear. The lion acted by its nature.”

She lowered her head. “Yet I opened the cage.”

“And he created the danger by cruelty,” Holmes said.

I could see tears beneath her one good eye.

“I have lived in hiding,” she said. “The scars upon my face are punishment enough.”

Holmes inclined his head. “The law cannot touch you now,” he said. “The event is long past. If you seek peace, you must find it within yourself.”

She replaced the veil slowly.

“Thank you for listening,” she whispered.

As we left the house, I turned to Holmes.

“It is a sad story,” I said.

“Yes,” he answered. “There are crimes of cold calculation, and there are acts born of misery. This belongs to the latter.”

“You do not judge her harshly?” I asked.

“I judge the man who drove her to desperation,” Holmes replied quietly.

Thus ended the strange confession of the Veiled Lodger. It was not a case for the courts, but for conscience. And in that silent room, beneath a dark veil, truth had at last been spoken.

The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

Part 1

The case of Shoscombe Old Place came to us in the autumn of 1903. It was brought by a man who showed signs of deep worry, though he tried to appear steady.

His name was Mr. John Mason. He was head trainer of racehorses at Shoscombe Old Place, the country home of Sir Robert Norberton. Mason was a strong and capable man, but his face showed strain.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “I fear that something strange is happening at Shoscombe. Sir Robert’s behavior has changed greatly. And there are things at the house that cannot be explained.”

Holmes motioned him to sit. “Tell me everything,” he said.

“Sir Robert owns a fine horse named Shoscombe Prince,” Mason began. “The horse is to run in an important race soon. It could win a great sum of money. But Sir Robert has fallen into heavy debt. He depends upon that race.”

“And what has changed?” Holmes asked.

“His sister, Lady Beatrice Norberton, lived at Shoscombe,” Mason replied. “She was kind and steady. She often spoke with me about the horses. But for several days now I have not seen her clearly.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I have seen a figure at a window,” Mason said. “It looked like Lady Beatrice. But her face seemed pale and strange. When I tried to approach her, she withdrew.”

Holmes’s eyes narrowed slightly. “Go on.”

“There is more,” Mason said. “Sir Robert has been in a violent temper. He has quarreled with servants. He has dismissed the old butler and replaced him with a rough man from London.”

“Has Lady Beatrice been seen by others?” Holmes asked.

“Only from a distance,” Mason answered. “And always briefly.”

“When did you last speak with her directly?” Holmes asked.

Mason hesitated. “It has been over a week.”

Holmes leaned back. “And during that week, has anything unusual occurred?”

Mason nodded slowly. “Yes. At night, I have seen Sir Robert carry something heavy from the house toward the old crypt in the churchyard.”

“The crypt?” I repeated.

“Yes,” Mason said. “It is an ancient vault near the church. I saw him enter it after dark. I dared not follow.”

Holmes rose at once. “We shall go to Shoscombe Old Place.”

The next day we arrived. The house was large and old, surrounded by wide fields and stables. Sir Robert received us with cold politeness. He was a tall man with sharp features and restless eyes.

“I do not know why my trainer has troubled you,” he said. “There is no mystery here.”

“We prefer to see for ourselves,” Holmes replied calmly.

Sir Robert’s expression grew hard, but he could not refuse.

Holmes first visited the stables. Shoscombe Prince was indeed a fine horse, strong and well kept.

“The race is near?” Holmes asked Mason quietly.

“Very near,” he replied.

We then asked to see Lady Beatrice. A servant said that she was unwell and resting.

“May we speak with her?” Holmes asked.

There was hesitation. At last we were led to a distant part of the house. A woman appeared briefly at an upper window. Her figure resembled that of Lady Beatrice, but her face was partly hidden.

“She is weak,” Sir Robert said sharply. “She cannot receive visitors.”

Holmes said nothing.

That evening, after darkness had fallen, Holmes and I walked toward the churchyard. The air was cold and still. The old crypt stood near the church wall.

Holmes approached the door quietly. It was unlocked.

Inside, the air was heavy. A faint smell hung in the space.

Holmes lifted his lantern. Upon the stone floor lay signs that something had recently been placed there.

“Watson,” he said softly, “we are close to the truth.”

At that moment we heard footsteps outside.

Sir Robert stood at the entrance, his face pale with anger.

“You have no right here!” he cried.

Holmes turned calmly. “On the contrary,” he said. “We have every right. Your sister is dead.”

Sir Robert stared at him in shock.

“You have concealed her death,” Holmes continued. “You feared that her passing would affect your finances. You have dressed another woman to appear at the window, to give the impression that she still lives.”

Sir Robert’s shoulders sagged.

“You carried the body here to hide it until after the race,” Holmes said.

There was silence in the crypt.

Sir Robert covered his face. “I was desperate,” he said hoarsely. “If the creditors knew she was dead, they would seize the estate. The race is my last hope.”

“You have committed no murder,” Holmes said firmly. “But you have acted with grave dishonesty.”

Sir Robert nodded slowly. “She died suddenly,” he said. “I panicked.”

Holmes looked at him with steady eyes. “The truth must now be told. The race and the debts cannot excuse deceit.”

Sir Robert sank onto a stone bench, defeated.

Thus the dark secret of Shoscombe Old Place was uncovered. It was not murder, but fear and financial ruin that had driven a man to hide his sister’s death and deceive those around him.

The matter was placed before proper authorities, and the truth became known.

As we left the churchyard, I turned to Holmes.

“It was not a violent crime,” I said.

“No,” Holmes replied. “But it shows how quickly honor may fall when pressed

by fear.”

The wind moved softly among the trees as we walked back toward the house. And the old place of Shoscombe, once filled with secrecy, lay quiet at last.

Part 2

The following morning the full truth came into the light. Sir Robert, after a long and painful night, agreed to make a formal statement. The local authorities were informed, and the doctor who had attended Lady Beatrice was called to confirm that her death had been natural and sudden.

Holmes spoke quietly with Mason before we left the grounds.

“You were right to be uneasy,” he said. “Your loyalty to your work and to your employer did not blind you to what was strange.”

Mason nodded. “I never believed Sir Robert capable of violence,” he said. “But I could not understand why Lady Beatrice vanished from sight.”

“He was not capable of violence,” Holmes replied. “Only of panic.”

It soon became clear how the deception had been carried out. Lady Beatrice had died quietly in her room. Sir Robert, already burdened with debt and pressure from creditors, feared that her death would make his situation worse. The estate, partly dependent upon her income and influence, would be exposed to immediate claims.

In his desperation, he had dismissed the old butler, who might have objected or spoken too freely. He hired instead a rough man who would obey without question. A woman of similar height to Lady Beatrice had been persuaded, with payment, to appear briefly at the window from a distance. No one was allowed near enough to look closely.

At night, under cover of darkness, Sir Robert had moved his sister’s body to the old crypt, intending to keep it hidden until after the great race. He believed that if Shoscombe Prince won, he would gain the money needed to satisfy his creditors and settle affairs before announcing her death.

“It was a foolish plan,” I said to Holmes as we walked through the stables one

last time.

“Yes,” he answered. “But not born of cruelty. Only fear.”

We paused before the stall of Shoscombe Prince. The horse stood strong and restless, unaware of the human drama unfolding around him.

“Will the race proceed?” I asked.

“That is no longer our concern,” Holmes replied. “Truth has its own race to run.”

Sir Robert came to us before our departure. His proud manner had softened. He looked older, worn by the strain.

“I thank you,” he said quietly. “You might have accused me of darker deeds. You did not.”

Holmes met his gaze steadily. “You wronged no one beyond deception,” he said. “But deception grows dangerous if allowed to continue.”

Sir Robert bowed his head. “I see that now.”

As our train carried us back toward London, I reflected on the events.

“It is strange,” I said. “We have faced murderers without remorse. Yet this case feels heavier in another way.”

Holmes looked out at the passing fields.

“Because it touches weakness rather than wickedness,” he said. “A man of breeding and standing allowed fear to guide him. That is often more tragic than deliberate crime.”

“And Lady Beatrice?” I asked.

“She was loved,” Holmes said quietly. “Her brother’s error does not change that.”

He fell silent for some time, then added, “When pressure mounts, character is tested. Some stand firm. Others bend. Sir Robert bent—but he did not break entirely.”

The countryside faded behind us, and the towers of London began to rise in the distance.

Thus ended the affair of Shoscombe Old Place. No life had been taken by violence, yet truth had been hidden beneath stone and silence. In uncovering it,

Holmes once again showed that calm reason can bring light even to quiet, troubled places.

And so another strange chapter was closed.

The Adventure of the Retired Colourman

Part 1

The case of the Retired Colourman reached us in the late autumn of 1903. It was one of those affairs in which suspicion, greed, and loneliness were closely bound together. Though not as violent as some crimes I have known, it left a deep impression upon me.

One morning a young woman entered our rooms in Baker Street. Her name was Miss Edith Woodley. She was pale and anxious, yet determined.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “my uncle has disappeared. I fear that something terrible has happened.”

Holmes motioned her to sit. “Your uncle’s name?” he asked.

“Mr. Josiah Amberley,” she replied. “He was once a colourman—a dealer in paints and materials. He retired some years ago. He lives in Lewisham.”

“And when did he disappear?” Holmes asked.

“Three days ago,” she said. “But it is not only that. His wife has also vanished.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened slightly. “Go on.”

“My uncle married late in life,” she explained. “His wife was much younger. There were quarrels. He was jealous and suspicious. Recently he claimed that she had left him with another man and stolen a large sum of money.”

“Did he report this to the police?” Holmes asked.

“He spoke of doing so,” she replied. “But when I went to the house, I found it locked. There was no sign of either of them.”

Holmes leaned back thoughtfully. “Have you reason to suspect foul play?”

“My uncle wrote me a strange letter,” she said, producing it. “He said that he had been betrayed and ruined. His tone was bitter.”

Holmes read the letter carefully. “Did he have enemies?” he asked.

“He was not well liked,” Miss Woodley admitted. “He was harsh and miserly.”

Holmes rose. “We shall visit Lewisham.”

That afternoon we reached the modest house where Mr. Amberley had lived. The windows were shuttered, and the air within felt close and stale. A neighbor informed us that Mr. Amberley had left suddenly two days before, saying he would travel.

Holmes asked for access to the house. Once inside, he moved slowly from room to room. There were signs of recent disturbance—furniture shifted, drawers opened.

“You say he claimed that his wife had run away with a man?” Holmes asked Miss Woodley.

“Yes,” she replied. “A young doctor who lived nearby.”

“Is that doctor missing as well?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” she said quietly.

Holmes’s face grew intent. “Interesting.”

He examined the sitting room. Upon the mantel lay a revolver. It had been fired.

“When did your uncle say the theft occurred?” Holmes asked.

“On the night before he vanished,” she replied.

Holmes bent to inspect the carpet. There was a faint mark near the fireplace, as if something heavy had been dragged.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “do you detect an odor?”

I inhaled. There was a faint, unpleasant smell in the air.

Holmes nodded. “Paint and chemicals,” he said. “But something else beneath.”

He then moved to the cellar. The air grew stronger there. The smell was heavier, mixed with something darker.

Holmes stopped before a section of wall that had been recently painted. The color was slightly uneven.

“Curious,” he murmured.

He tapped the wall lightly. The sound was hollow.

“Watson,” he said in a low voice, “this is no ordinary case of flight.”

He called for tools, and with careful effort the plaster was broken open.

Behind the wall lay two bodies.

Miss Woodley cried out and turned away.

The faces of the dead were those of Mr. Amberley's wife and the young doctor.

Holmes stood silent for a moment.

"They did not run away," he said quietly. "They were killed."

"But by whom?" I asked.

Holmes's eyes were cold now.

"By the only man left alive to tell the story," he said.

"You mean Mr. Amberley?" Miss Woodley whispered.

Holmes nodded.

"He accused them to conceal his crime," Holmes said. "He murdered them both and hid their bodies. Then he spread the tale of betrayal to explain their absence."

"But why?" I asked.

"Jealousy," Holmes replied. "And greed. He believed his wife unfaithful. He feared losing his money."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. Inspector MacKinnon entered with news.

"Mr. Amberley has been found," he said. "He was attempting to board a train under a false name."

Holmes gave a short nod. "Bring him here."

When Amberley arrived under guard, his face was grey and drawn. He saw the broken wall and the exposed bodies.

For a moment he said nothing.

"You have found them," he muttered at last.

"Yes," Holmes replied. "Your tale of flight was clever, but not enough."

Amberley's shoulders sagged. "She betrayed me," he said bitterly. "She would have ruined me."

"So you ruined yourself," Holmes answered calmly.

The retired colourman sank into a chair, defeated.

Thus began the grim and tragic case of the Retired Colourman.

Part 2

Amberley sat motionless, his hands hanging at his sides. The anger that had once filled him seemed to have drained away. In its place there was only a dull, empty look.

“You planned it carefully,” Holmes said in a steady voice. “You quarreled with your wife. You suspected her and the young doctor. Instead of seeking proof, you chose revenge.”

Amberley lifted his head slowly. “I knew,” he muttered. “I saw how they spoke to each other.”

“You believed you knew,” Holmes corrected him. “Belief is not proof.”

Inspector MacKinnon stepped forward. “You will answer these matters at the station,” he said firmly.

But Holmes continued, for he wished to make the truth plain.

“You invited them both into the house,” Holmes said. “You shot them near the fireplace. That explains the mark upon the carpet and the discharged revolver. You then concealed the bodies behind the newly painted wall. As a former colourman, you knew how to mix and apply plaster and paint without drawing attention.”

Amberley’s lips trembled slightly, but he did not deny it.

“After that,” Holmes went on, “you created your story. You told neighbors that your wife had run away with the doctor and stolen money. You left the house locked, so that their absence would appear natural. But you forgot one thing.”

Amberley looked up weakly. “What?”

“You forgot that guilt leaves signs,” Holmes said quietly. “The smell in the cellar. The uneven paint. The hollow sound of the wall. And your sudden journey under a false name.”

Amberley gave a bitter laugh. “I thought I had been clever.”

“You were careful,” Holmes replied. “But not careful enough.”

Miss Woodley stood near the doorway, pale and shaken. “I never imagined he could do such a thing,” she whispered.

Holmes turned toward her with gentleness in his tone. “Crime often grows from feelings that are small at first,” he said. “Jealousy, fear, suspicion. When they are allowed to grow without reason, they can become deadly.”

The inspector signaled to the constables, and Amberley was led away. He did not resist. His shoulders were bent, and his steps were slow.

When the house had grown quiet once more, I looked around the room. The ordinary furniture, the modest walls, the smell of paint—everything seemed common and plain. Yet behind one wall had lain two hidden lives.

“It is a grim affair,” I said.

Holmes nodded. “Yes. The most dangerous crimes are those committed in private rooms, under the cover of ordinary life.”

“He could have sought help,” I said. “He could have spoken openly of his fears.”

“He chose silence,” Holmes answered. “And in silence, his thoughts turned dark.”

We stepped outside into the fresh air. The sky was grey, and the streets of Lewisham were quiet. It was hard to believe that such violence had taken place behind those closed shutters.

“Do you feel pity for him?” I asked as we walked toward the station.

Holmes was silent for a moment.

“I feel pity for wasted reason,” he said at last. “He allowed suspicion to rule him. In the end, he destroyed not only two lives, but his own.”

The case was soon concluded. The evidence was clear, and Amberley confessed fully. The retired colourman, who had once dealt in paints and simple trade, had hidden his crime behind fresh plaster and false words. Yet truth, as always, came through.

Thus ended the tragic story of the Retired Colourman. It was not a crime of sudden rage alone, but of long-nursed jealousy and cold planning. And once again, Holmes showed that careful observation can break even the thickest wall of deception.