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Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

Silver Blaze

Part 1

"I am afraid, Watson, that I shall have to go," said Holmes one morning as we sat at breakfast. His voice was calm, but I could see that his mind was already far away from our table in Baker Street.

"Go? Where to?" I asked.

"To Dartmoor. To King's Pyland."

I was not surprised. For two days he had walked about our rooms with his head bent and his pipe in his mouth. He had read every paper that came to the house and had spoken very little. All England was talking about one thing only: the strange loss of the famous racehorse Silver Blaze and the terrible death of his trainer, John Straker. I knew that Holmes could not resist such a problem.

"I would be very glad to come with you," I said.

"My dear Watson, I shall be grateful if you do. There are points in this case which are most unusual. We must catch the train at once. Pray bring your field-glass."

An hour later we were in a first-class carriage on our way to Exeter. Holmes wore his travelling cap and held a bundle of fresh papers which he had bought at the station. He read quickly, then folded the last paper and placed it under the seat.

He offered me a cigar and looked out of the window.

"We are moving at fifty-three miles an hour," he said quietly.

"How can you tell?" I asked.

"The telegraph posts are sixty yards apart. The rest is simple." He turned toward me. "You have read about the murder of John Straker and the loss of Silver Blaze?"

"Only what the papers say."

"Then let us begin with the clear facts. Too many guesses have been made. We must separate fact from talk. On Tuesday evening I received telegrams from Colonel Ross, the owner of the horse, and from Inspector Gregory. Both asked for my help."

"Why did we not leave yesterday?"

Holmes smiled slightly. "Because I made an error. I believed that such a famous horse could not be hidden long on the open moor. I expected news of his return. When none came, I saw that I must act."

He leaned forward and spoke in his clear, steady way. "Silver Blaze is a five-year-old horse of great value. He was the favorite for the Wessex Cup. Large sums of money were placed upon him. Many people would gain if he did not run the race. He was kept at King's Pyland under the care of John Straker, a former jockey who had served Colonel Ross faithfully for years."

Holmes explained that there were only four horses in the stable. Three stable-lads worked there. One boy stayed awake each night to guard the horses. Straker lived in a small house near the stable with his wife and one maid. The land around was lonely moor. Far away stood another training stable at Mapleton, run by a man named Silas Brown.

"Now we come to Monday night," said Holmes. "The horses were locked in at nine. Two lads went to supper at Straker's house. The third, Ned Hunter, remained on duty. At a little after nine the maid, Edith Baxter, carried his supper to the stable. It was curried mutton. She carried a lantern, for it was dark."

As she walked across the moor, a man stepped out of the darkness. He wore a grey suit and a cloth cap. His face was pale and he seemed nervous. He asked where he was. When she told him he stood near the training stables, he grew

excited. He offered her money to give a folded paper to the stable-boy.

The maid was frightened. She hurried to the window where she passed the food inside. As she spoke to Hunter, the stranger came again and spoke through the window. He tried to get information about the horses. Hunter called him a spy and ran to let loose the dog. The stranger vanished into the dark.

“An important point,” said Holmes to me in the train, “is that the stable door was locked before the boy ran out. The window was too small for a man to enter.”

After this event, Hunter sent word to Straker. The trainer was uneasy. At one in the morning his wife woke and saw him dressing. He said he could not sleep because he worried about the horses. Though rain was falling, he put on his coat and went out into the night.

In the morning Mrs. Straker found that her husband had not returned. She went to the stable. The door was open. Hunter sat in a chair, deep asleep and hard to wake. The stall of Silver Blaze was empty.

The two other lads were called. Hunter was under the power of a strong drug. He could not speak clearly. They left him and searched the moor. Soon they saw something terrible. Straker’s coat hung on a bush. In a hollow in the ground they found his body.

His head had been struck by a heavy blow. On his thigh was a long, clean cut from a sharp blade. In his right hand he held a small knife covered with blood. In his left hand was a red and black silk necktie. The maid said it belonged to the stranger from the night before.

Hunter later said that the stranger must have drugged his food. Tests showed that the mutton contained powdered opium. The others who ate the same dish had not been harmed. Silver Blaze was gone. Though a reward was offered and the moor searched, no sign of the horse was found.

“These are the clear facts,” Holmes said as the train rushed on. “Inspector Gregory arrested the stranger. His name is Fitzroy Simpson. He had placed large bets against Silver Blaze. His clothes were wet from the storm. He carried a heavy stick which could have caused the head wound. Yet he bore no wound from Straker’s knife.”

I thought carefully. “Could Straker have cut himself when he fell?” I asked.

“It is very possible,” said Holmes. “If so, one point against Simpson is removed.”

He described the police theory. They believed Simpson drugged the boy, entered the stable, took the horse, and killed Straker when the trainer met him on the moor. The horse then either escaped or was hidden.

“But there are questions,” Holmes said softly. “Why remove the horse at all? Why not harm it in the stable? Where is the key? Where is the proof that Simpson bought the opium? And how could he hide such a horse in a strange land?”

When we reached Tavistock that evening, two men waited for us. One was Colonel Ross, tall and strong, with fair hair and bright blue eyes. The other was Inspector Gregory, neat and sharp.

We drove through the quiet town toward the lonely moor. The air was cool and wide after the close carriage. Gregory spoke of his case with confidence, though he admitted the proof was not complete. Holmes listened and asked quiet questions.

Soon we arrived at Straker’s house. Beyond it lay the grey stable building. The moor stretched far in every direction under the fading light. Holmes remained seated in the carriage for a moment, looking toward the sky as if lost in thought. Then he started and stepped down. I knew that some idea had come to him, though he said nothing.

Part 2

Holmes first asked to see the things found in John Straker’s pockets. We all went into the small sitting-room, and Inspector Gregory opened a tin box upon the table. Inside were simple objects: a box of matches, a short piece of candle, a pipe, some tobacco, a silver watch with a chain, a few gold coins, a pencil-case, several papers, and a small knife with an ivory handle and a thin blade.

Holmes lifted the knife and studied it closely. “This is a strange weapon for a man to carry on a dark moor,” he said quietly. “It is very delicate.”

I looked at it and recognized it at once. “It is a knife used in eye surgery,” I said.

“For very fine work.”

“Exactly,” Holmes replied. “For very fine work.” He seemed pleased by this detail.

Among the papers was a bill from a dressmaker in London for a large sum of money. It was made out to a man named William Derbyshire. Mrs. Straker said that Derbyshire was a friend of her husband and sometimes had letters sent to their house. Holmes read the bill carefully but made no remark at that time.

As we left the room, Mrs. Straker stood in the hall. Her face was pale and thin with grief. Holmes looked at her kindly and spoke of a garden-party in Plymouth, as if he believed he had seen her there before. She denied it firmly. Holmes apologized and followed the Inspector outside. I saw that he had watched her face very closely.

We walked across the moor to the hollow where the body had been found. The ground had been covered partly with matting so that the marks would not be destroyed. Inspector Gregory had brought one of Straker’s boots, one of Simpson’s shoes, and a horseshoe of Silver Blaze.

Holmes lay down upon the ground and studied the mud with great care. Suddenly he picked up a half-burned match which was almost hidden in the earth. The Inspector was annoyed that he had not seen it before.

“I expected to find it,” said Holmes calmly.

He compared the boots to the prints in the mud. Then he rose and walked slowly about the hollow and the bushes near it. After some time he said that he wished to take a walk over the moor before night fell. He placed the horseshoe in his pocket.

Colonel Ross seemed impatient. He wished to know whether he should remove his horse from the race.

“Certainly not,” Holmes said firmly. “Let the name stand.”

The Colonel looked surprised but did not argue. He and the Inspector returned to the house while Holmes and I walked alone across the wide land. The sun was low, and the moor glowed red and gold. Holmes, however, saw none of its beauty. His eyes were fixed upon the ground and upon the distant buildings of Mapleton.

“Let us think only of the horse for the moment,” he said at last. “If Silver Blaze

escaped during the struggle, where would he go? A horse does not love to wander alone. He would return to his stable or go to another stable. He would not roam wild for days. Therefore he must be at King's Pyland or at Mapleton."

"He is not at King's Pyland," I said.

"Then he is at Mapleton," Holmes answered calmly. "We shall test that idea."

We walked toward a hollow place where the ground was soft. Holmes believed that if the horse had passed there, his tracks would remain. We separated and searched. Within a short time Holmes called out with satisfaction. In the wet earth lay the clear mark of a horse's hoof. The horseshoe from his pocket fitted it exactly.

"Imagination, Watson," he said. "It guides us where simple sight does not."

We followed the track across firmer ground, lost it, found it again, and at last saw beside it the mark of a man's boot.

"Before, the horse was alone," I said.

"Yes. Now he is led," Holmes replied.

The tracks turned sharply, first toward King's Pyland and then back again toward Mapleton. We followed them until they ended at the paved entrance of the Mapleton stables.

A groom came out and told us not to stand about. Holmes offered him a coin and asked if his master, Silas Brown, rose early. At that moment a fierce older man came from the gate with a whip in his hand. He ordered the groom away and demanded what we wanted.

Holmes spoke softly and leaned close to him. I could not hear the words, but I saw the man's face change. He grew pale and angry. He denied something strongly. Holmes suggested that they speak inside.

For twenty minutes they remained within. When they returned, Silas Brown was no longer fierce. He was shaking and pale. His proud manner had vanished. He promised to follow Holmes's instructions exactly.

When we walked away, I asked Holmes if the horse was there.

"Yes," he said. "Brown found him wandering on the moor early that morning. He recognized him at once from the white mark on his forehead. He had placed heavy bets upon his own horse. Silver Blaze was the only horse that could defeat

him. Brown first thought to return the horse. Then he decided to hide him until after the race."

"But the stable was searched," I said.

"An old trainer knows many tricks," Holmes replied. "And now that I have spoken with him, he will guard that horse more carefully than any man alive."

I feared that Brown might harm the animal to protect himself. Holmes shook his head. "His only hope is to produce the horse safely. He will not risk more trouble."

I was still confused. "But what of Straker's death?"

Holmes surprised me. "We return to London tonight," he said.

I could not understand. We had discovered the horse, yet the murder remained. Holmes would say no more until we reached Straker's house.

Colonel Ross received us coldly. Holmes announced that we would leave by the night train. The Colonel seemed disappointed and almost angry.

"You have not solved the crime," he said.

"There are difficulties," Holmes answered lightly. "But I believe your horse will run on Tuesday. Pray have your jockey ready."

He asked for a photograph of Straker and then stepped out to speak to the maid once more. When he returned, we left.

As we entered the carriage, Holmes stopped a stable-lad and asked about the sheep in a nearby field.

"Three of them have gone lame, sir," the lad said.

Holmes laughed softly and rubbed his hands. "A long shot, Watson," he whispered. "But it strikes the mark."

On the journey back he said little. Four days later we traveled again, this time to Winchester for the Wessex Cup. Colonel Ross met us. His manner was stiff and serious. He had seen nothing of his horse.

"You would know him if you saw him?" Holmes asked quietly.

The Colonel was offended. "A child would know Silver Blaze," he said. "White forehead and mottled foreleg."

At the course the betting was lively. To everyone's surprise, the odds on Silver

Blaze had shortened greatly. Holmes only smiled.

When the horses came out, five passed us. Then a strong bay horse appeared, carrying the Colonel's colors.

"That is not my horse!" the Colonel cried. "There is no white mark!"

"Let us see how he runs," Holmes said calmly.

The race began. The horses were close together. At the final stretch, the Colonel's horse rushed forward and won by several lengths.

"It is my race," the Colonel said in confusion. "But that is not my horse."

Holmes suggested that we wash the horse's face and leg. In the weighing enclosure, spirits were applied. Slowly the brown color washed away. Beneath it appeared the familiar white blaze and mottled leg.

"Silver Blaze!" the Colonel cried in wonder.

Holmes explained that he had found the horse hidden and had allowed him to run under false coloring. The Colonel thanked him warmly but asked again about the murderer of John Straker.

Holmes answered quietly, "He is here."

"Here?"

"Yes. The murderer stands behind you." He laid his hand upon the horse's neck.

"The horse?" we both cried.

"Yes. In self-defence," said Holmes. "John Straker was not the loyal servant you believed him to be."

The bell rang for the next race, and Holmes delayed his full explanation until we were seated together in the train returning to London.

Part 3

In the quiet of the Pullman carriage, as the train carried us back toward London, Colonel Ross leaned forward and fixed his eyes upon Holmes. The noise of the wheels was steady and soft, and the lamps above us gave a calm yellow light. Holmes sat with his long fingers joined before him and began his explanation in his clear and even voice.

“When I left London,” he said, “I believed that Fitzroy Simpson was guilty. The evidence appeared strong. Yet there were small points which troubled me. The most important of these was the curried mutton.”

The Colonel frowned. “I still do not see how that dish has such weight.”

“Consider it closely,” Holmes replied. “Powdered opium has a taste. It is not strong, but it can be detected. If placed in an ordinary meal, the eater would notice it. A curry, however, has a strong flavor. It can hide the taste of the drug. That is why the mutton was curried.”

He paused and looked at us to be certain we followed him.

“Now ask yourself this: who chose the supper that night? Could Simpson, a stranger who appeared suddenly in the dark, have arranged for a curry to be prepared? It is impossible. The dish must have been planned within the house.”

I began to understand. “Then the drug was placed in the portion meant for the stable-boy after the rest had been served?”

“Exactly,” said Holmes. “The maid carried the dish to the stable. The others who ate from the same pot suffered no harm. Therefore the opium was added after the boy’s share had been set aside. Only two people had access: John Straker and his wife.”

The Colonel’s face grew stern. “You do not mean to accuse Mrs. Straker?”

“No,” Holmes answered calmly. “Her manner convinced me of her innocence. My attention therefore rested upon her husband.”

He leaned back slightly.

“Another fact guided me: the silence of the dog. A stranger had entered the stable and led out a valuable horse. Yet the dog did not bark loudly enough to wake the lads above. Why? Because the visitor was known to the animal.”

“Straker,” I said softly.

“Yes. It must have been Straker. Step by step the truth formed in my mind. He had drugged the boy so that he might have free access to the stable. He had led Silver Blaze out onto the moor in the middle of the night.”

The Colonel spoke with anger. “But for what purpose? He was my trusted man.”

Holmes nodded slowly. “Trusted, yes. Yet the papers found in his pocket told

another story. There was the large bill from the dressmaker in London. A sum far beyond a trainer's salary. It was made out to William Derbyshire. Mrs. Straker denied knowledge of such a dress. Therefore I concluded that Straker was living under another name and supporting another woman."

The Colonel's hand struck the seat. "A disgrace!"

"Debt presses heavily upon a man," Holmes continued. "Straker had found himself in financial difficulty. There is a method known among dishonest trainers. A slight cut may be made upon the tendon of a horse's leg. It is done beneath the skin. The horse becomes slightly lame. The cause appears natural, perhaps a strain. The horse loses the race. The trainer, who has placed money secretly against his own animal, gains a large sum."

I felt a chill as I listened. "And the small knife—"

"Was the instrument," Holmes finished. "A delicate blade for a delicate task. That is why he carried it. He required the candle and the match to see clearly in the darkness."

The Colonel sat silent, his face pale.

"Straker removed his overcoat before beginning," Holmes went on. "He stood behind the horse and struck the match. At that moment Silver Blaze, startled by the sudden light and perhaps sensing danger, lashed out with his hind leg. The steel shoe struck Straker full upon the forehead. He fell at once. As he fell, his own knife cut his thigh. The blow from the horse was enough to cause death."

"And Simpson's cravat?" I asked.

"Dropped during his earlier visit and later picked up by Straker," Holmes replied. "Perhaps Straker intended to use it to steady the horse's leg. It remained clutched in his hand when he died."

The Colonel breathed deeply. "Then my horse acted only in self-defence."

"Precisely," said Holmes. "He committed no crime with intent. He saved himself from injury."

"But the sheep?" I asked. "Why did you question the lad about them?"

Holmes smiled faintly. "A man does not attempt such a delicate operation without practice. I reasoned that Straker must have tried the method before. Upon

what animal could he test it? Sheep are near at hand and of little value. When I heard that several had gone lame, my final doubt vanished."

The Colonel shook his head slowly. "I trusted him for years."

"He may have been honest for years," Holmes answered gently. "But temptation came. Debt and secret life can change a man. Once he chose that path, the end followed."

There was silence for some moments as the train rushed on through the night.

At last the Colonel spoke again. "And Silas Brown?"

"He found the horse wandering upon the moor early the next morning," Holmes said. "He recognized him at once. His own horse, Desborough, stood second in the betting. Brown had wagered heavily. He chose to hide Silver Blaze in his stable and colored his white marks with dye. When I described his movements in detail, he understood that denial was useless. He agreed to obey my instructions and produce the horse unharmed."

The Colonel gave a short laugh without joy. "And you chose not to reveal him publicly."

"For the moment," Holmes replied. "He will think carefully before he risks such conduct again. The greater wrong lay with Straker."

The lamps of the station began to appear in the darkness outside.

"There is one more point," I said. "You mentioned the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

Holmes's eyes brightened. "Yes, Watson. That was the key which opened the door. The dog did nothing. That silence told us that the visitor was no stranger. Often it is what does not happen which matters most."

The train slowed as we approached the platform. Colonel Ross rose and held out his hand.

"Mr. Holmes," he said, "I owe you my thanks for more than the recovery of my horse. You have cleared a dark shadow from my stable."

Holmes bowed slightly. "It was a simple chain of reasoning once the true starting point was found. We must always seek the fact which seems small and strange. From that, the rest may follow."

As we stepped down onto the platform, I reflected upon the case. A loyal horse had defended himself. A trusted servant had fallen through greed. And once again I had seen how my friend's calm mind could bring light into confusion.

The matter of Silver Blaze was ended, yet its lesson remained clear to me. In the quiet detail, in the overlooked flavor of a simple dish, lay the truth.

The Adventure of the Cardboard Box

Part 1

It was a very hot day in August. The air in Baker Street felt heavy and still. The bright sun shone on the yellow bricks of the house across from ours, and the light hurt the eyes. It was hard to believe that in winter the same walls looked dark and cold through the fog. Our blinds were half closed to keep out the worst of the heat. Holmes lay stretched upon the sofa, reading a letter again and again. I sat in a chair near the window with the morning paper in my hand.

I had spent years in India, and I could bear heat better than cold. Even so, the day felt long and dull. Parliament had risen, and most people had left the city. There was little news of interest. I wished that I were walking in the quiet woods of the country or sitting by the sea. My money, however, was low, and I had put off any travel. Holmes had no such wish for the country. He liked to remain in the center of London, where news and crime moved through the streets like hidden threads. The sea and fields meant nothing to him unless a crime had followed him there.

Holmes seemed deep in thought and did not speak. I threw the paper down and leaned back in my chair. My mind began to wander. I thought of many small matters and followed them one after another without clear aim. Suddenly Holmes spoke.

"You are right, Watson," he said calmly. "It does seem a most foolish way to settle a dispute."

I started and sat upright. "What did you say?"

He looked at me with a faint smile.

“You were thinking that war is a foolish way to settle a question between nations.”

I stared at him in surprise. “Holmes, how could you know that?”

He laughed lightly. “You remember that I once showed you how a man may follow the silent thoughts of another by careful watching. You doubted me then. Today I wished to show you once more.”

“But I have not moved,” I said. “I have only sat here.”

“You have moved more than you believe,” he replied. “Your face and eyes speak clearly. After you threw down your paper, you looked at the picture of General Gordon upon the wall. Then your eyes moved to the portrait of Henry Ward Beecher upon your shelf. From there your thoughts passed to the American Civil War. I saw anger in your face, then sadness. You touched your old wound from the war. Then you smiled at the strange idea that men fight great battles to settle matters that might be solved by words.”

I could not deny it. He had followed my thoughts step by step.

“It is wonderful,” I said.

“It is simple,” Holmes answered. “Now let us turn to something more solid. I have here a note from Inspector Lestrade. It concerns a curious event in Croydon. Have you seen it in the paper?”

“No.”

“Then read this.”

He handed me the newspaper and pointed to a small paragraph under a bold title. I read aloud.

“A lady named Miss Susan Cushing, who lives in Cross Street, Croydon, received a small parcel yesterday afternoon. Inside a cardboard box filled with salt were two human ears, newly cut. The parcel came from Belfast. Miss Cushing is a quiet woman of fifty years and has few friends. Some years ago she had trouble with three young medical students who rented rooms in her house. The police believe the parcel may be a cruel joke sent by those young men.”

I lowered the paper. “That is a terrible joke if it is one.”

Holmes held up a letter. “Lestrade writes that the case may interest me. The box was a tobacco box. The parcel was sent by post from Belfast. The sender is unknown. The medical student idea is the present theory, but there is little proof.”

“What do you think?” I asked.

“I think,” he said slowly, “that we should see for ourselves. The heat should not prevent us from work.”

I agreed at once. The dull day had already seemed long. We changed our coats and called for a cab. Within the hour we were on our way to Croydon.

A short shower of rain fell as we traveled, and the air grew fresher. When we reached Cross Street, we found Lestrade waiting before a small house. He greeted Holmes warmly.

“I am glad you have come,” he said. “It is a strange matter, but I fear it is only a foolish act by those students.”

“We shall see,” Holmes replied.

The house was neat and plain. Miss Cushing received us in a small sitting-room. She was a quiet woman with a serious face. She seemed more annoyed than frightened.

“It is a shame,” she said firmly. “I have done nothing to deserve such treatment. I live quietly and trouble no one.”

Holmes bowed slightly. “May we see the box?”

Lestrade placed it upon the table. It was a small cardboard box which once held tobacco. The brown paper wrapping lay beside it. Holmes examined the string first. He held it up close to his eyes and then laid it down carefully. He looked at the paper and read the address. The name was written clearly in ink: “Miss S. Cushing, Cross Street, Croydon.”

“Did you open it yourself?” Holmes asked the lady.

“Yes. I cut the string and poured out the salt. Then I saw what lay beneath. I fainted.”

Holmes nodded gently. He turned his attention to the contents. The salt lay in a small heap. Beneath it were two human ears. They were dark and small. One appeared to be from a woman, the other from a man. Holmes did not touch them

at once. He bent low and studied them closely.

“They are fresh,” he said quietly. “Not from a hospital room. Not from a class of students.”

Lestrade looked doubtful. “Why do you say that?”

“Because they are cut roughly. A medical student would remove them with care. These were removed in haste.”

Miss Cushing turned pale but remained calm.

“You had three students in your house some years ago?” Holmes asked.

“Yes. They were noisy and wild. I asked them to leave.”

“Do you know where they are now?”

“No.”

Holmes walked slowly about the room. He paused before the window and then returned to the table. He picked up one ear carefully and studied it from every side.

“There is something here,” he murmured.

I watched his face. He seemed deeply focused, as if the small object before him held great meaning. The simple tobacco box, the salt, the string—each was studied in turn.

“Miss Cushing,” he said at last, “have you any sisters?”

She looked surprised. “Yes. I have two.”

“Are you close to them?”

She hesitated. “We have not spoken for some time.”

Holmes exchanged a quick glance with Lestrade.

“May I ask where they live?” he continued gently.

Miss Cushing gave the addresses. One sister lived in New Street, Croydon. The other lived far away in Belfast.

Holmes straightened at once. “In Belfast?”

“Yes.”

The room grew very quiet. Holmes looked again at the address upon the parcel and then at the ears upon the table.

“Lestrade,” he said softly, “this case is not a foolish joke. It is something far more serious.”

Part 2

Lestrade stared at Holmes. “You do not believe the story about the medical students?”

“No,” Holmes replied quietly. “The more I look, the less I believe it. There is feeling behind this act. It is not simple mischief.”

Miss Cushing sat stiffly in her chair, her hands folded tightly in her lap. “I do not understand,” she said. “What have my sisters to do with it?”

Holmes did not answer at once. He lifted one of the ears again and examined it closely. Then he took a small lens from his pocket and looked even more carefully.

“These ears,” he said slowly, “have been cut from two different persons. One belonged to a man. The other belonged to a woman. The woman’s ear has small holes in the lobe for earrings. The skin is rough and dark, as from outdoor life. The man’s ear is thicker. Both are newly cut. There is no sign that they were preserved for study.”

Lestrade crossed his arms. “But why send them to this lady?”

Holmes looked toward Miss Cushing. “Because the sender wished her to recognize them.”

Miss Cushing gave a small cry. “Recognize them? I cannot. I have never seen such things before.”

Holmes watched her face closely. Her fear seemed real, but he did not appear fully satisfied.

“You said you have not spoken with your sisters for some time,” he continued gently. “May I ask why?”

Miss Cushing looked troubled. “There was disagreement. We were once very close. But there was anger, and we parted.”

“What was the cause of the anger?”

She hesitated again. “It was about a man. My sister Mary married a sailor. His name was James Browner. He was not a good husband. He drank and behaved badly. My other sister, Sarah, did not like him. There was much trouble between

them.”

Holmes’s eyes brightened slightly. “Where does Mary live now?”

“She went to Liverpool with her husband. I have not heard from her in months.”

“And Sarah?”

“She lives in New Street here in Croydon. But we do not visit.”

Holmes turned to Lestrade. “We must see the sister in New Street at once.”

Miss Cushing rose from her chair. “Do you think this concerns my sister Mary?” she asked in a weak voice.

“It may,” Holmes answered kindly. “But we shall learn more very soon.”

We left the house with Lestrade and walked a short distance to New Street. The rain had cleared, and the air felt cool and fresh after the heat of the morning. Holmes walked quickly, deep in thought.

“You see,” he said softly to me, “the parcel was addressed to Miss S. Cushing. There are two sisters with that name—Susan and Sarah. The sender may have intended it for the other sister.”

“You think there was an error?” I asked.

“It is possible. The writing on the parcel was clear but simple. A mistake in the first letter might easily occur.”

We soon reached a similar small house. Lestrade knocked firmly. After a short time the door was opened by a woman with a pale face and sharp eyes. She looked older than Miss Cushing and seemed nervous.

“Miss Sarah Cushing?” Lestrade asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “What is it?”

Holmes stepped forward. “May we speak with you? It concerns your sister.”

The woman’s face changed. “Susan? What has happened?”

“She received a parcel this morning,” Holmes said calmly. “It contained two human ears.”

Sarah Cushing gave a cry and pressed her hand to her mouth. For a moment she seemed about to faint, but she controlled herself.

“I know nothing of it,” she said quickly. “I have nothing to do with such things.”

Holmes watched her with close attention. “You have not heard from your sister

Mary lately?”

At the name Mary, the woman’s face grew even paler.

“No,” she whispered.

“And from her husband, James Browner?”

She shook her head but did not speak.

Holmes leaned slightly toward her. “Madam, I believe that you know more than you wish to say. I think that the parcel was meant for you.”

She stepped back as if struck. “For me?”

“Yes. The sender believed that you lived in Cross Street. He was mistaken.”

Her eyes filled with tears. “I moved from Cross Street three months ago,” she said slowly. “Few people knew.”

Holmes nodded. “That explains the address. The parcel was sent to the former home of Miss S. Cushing. It was meant for Sarah, not Susan.”

Lestrade looked surprised. “But why send such a thing to her?”

Holmes spoke gently but firmly. “Because the ears belonged to two persons she knew well.”

Sarah Cushing began to tremble. “No,” she whispered. “No.”

Holmes’s voice remained steady. “One ear was from a woman who wore earrings. A married woman, perhaps. The other from a man. I believe they belonged to your sister Mary and her husband.”

The woman gave a low cry and sank into a chair.

“James Browner was a sailor,” Holmes continued quietly. “A man of strong feeling. There was anger between him and you. You did not approve of his marriage. There were letters. There were quarrels. I believe that something terrible has happened.”

Sarah covered her face with her hands. She did not deny it.

Lestrade looked troubled. “You think Browner killed them both?”

“I believe so,” Holmes replied. “And in his anger and pain he sent proof of his act to the one he blamed for his misery.”

I felt a deep sadness as I listened. The cruel parcel was no joke. It was a message of grief and revenge.

Holmes rose. “Lestrade, we must send a telegram at once to the police in Liverpool and to Belfast. We must inquire about James Browner and his wife Mary. I expect that news of a crime has already reached them.”

Sarah Cushing lifted her head slowly. “It is my fault,” she whispered. “I hated him. I spoke words that made them quarrel. I wished them apart. I never wished for death.”

Holmes regarded her with a calm expression. “Words can wound as deeply as knives,” he said softly. “But the act itself belongs to the one who carried it out.”

We left her in the care of a neighbor and returned to the street.

“You are certain?” Lestrade asked.

“As certain as the facts allow,” Holmes answered. “The rough cut of the ears shows a sailor’s knife. The salt preserved them during travel by sea. The parcel came from Belfast, a port. The address was wrong only by small chance. The feeling behind it is personal and strong.”

We went at once to the telegraph office. Holmes wrote quickly and clearly. His mind moved from one fact to another, linking each with care.

“If I am correct,” he said to me as we waited, “the man will soon be found. He will not hide. He will feel that his act has already spoken.”

The rain began again as we left the office. The sky had grown darker, though it was still early afternoon. The quiet streets of Croydon seemed unchanged, yet we knew that a terrible truth lay behind the calm.

“A small box,” I said slowly. “A little string and salt. Yet behind it—”

“Behind it lies passion,” Holmes finished. “And passion often leads to violence.”

We returned to Baker Street to await news. Holmes sat once more upon the sofa, but he did not rest. His eyes were half closed, yet I knew that his thoughts were active and sharp.

“This is no simple puzzle,” he said quietly. “It is a story of love, anger, and revenge. We shall soon hear the rest.”

Part 3

That evening we waited in Baker Street for news. The air had cooled after the rain, but the day's heat still lingered in the walls. Holmes sat with his long legs stretched before the fireless grate, his fingers joined and his eyes half closed. I knew from long experience that his mind was working with great speed, though his body seemed still.

"You see, Watson," he said at last, "we must consider not only the physical facts but also the feelings of the people involved. The parcel was not sent to hide a crime. It was sent to show it."

"To show it?" I repeated.

"Yes. The sender wished the receiver to know exactly what had been done. That is why the ears were cut and preserved. That is why they were sent through the post instead of being hidden."

"Then Browner wished to hurt Sarah Cushing," I said slowly.

"Precisely. He believed that she had caused his trouble. From what we heard, she disliked him and interfered in his marriage. I suspect that there was deep anger between them."

Late that night a telegram arrived. Holmes read it quickly and handed it to me.

"Liverpool police report woman named Mary Browner missing. Husband James Browner absent from ship. Suspected foul play."

Holmes nodded. "As I expected."

The next day another message came. James Browner had been found aboard a ship bound for Belfast. He had not attempted to escape. He appeared calm but worn. When questioned, he confessed at once.

Lestrade came to Baker Street in person that afternoon. He carried papers in his hand and looked serious.

"You were correct, Holmes," he said. "Browner has confessed fully. He killed his wife and the man he believed had wronged him. He cut off the ears and sent them to Sarah Cushing."

Holmes inclined his head slightly. "Please tell us the details."

Lestrade sat down and spoke in a low voice.

"Browner was deeply jealous. He believed that his wife was too close to another

man, a friend of the family. Sarah Cushing had often spoken against him and had made trouble in the marriage. Browner said that Sarah's words poisoned his wife's mind against him. He felt alone and angry. One night, after drinking, he followed his wife and the other man to a house near the docks. There he confronted them. In his rage, he killed them both with a knife."

I felt a heavy sadness as I listened. "And afterward?"

"Afterward," Lestrade continued, "he seemed filled not with fear but with sorrow and anger. He cut off the ears as proof of what he had done. He packed them in salt and sent them from Belfast, where his ship was to stop. He meant the parcel for Sarah Cushing, but he used her old address by mistake."

Holmes spoke quietly. "Did he express regret?"

"Yes," said Lestrade. "He said that once the deed was done, he felt only horror. He claimed that he loved his wife deeply and that jealousy drove him mad."

Holmes remained silent for a moment. Then he said, "Jealousy is a strong force. It can turn love into hatred within an hour."

Lestrade rose. "I must return. Browner will stand trial. I wanted you to know that your reasoning was correct from the start."

After he left, I looked at Holmes thoughtfully.

"You solved it from very little," I said.

"From enough," he replied. "The rough cut of the ears told me that no careful student removed them. The salt suggested sea travel. The Belfast mark pointed toward a sailor. The wrong address pointed toward confusion between two sisters of the same name. The rest was human nature."

"And Miss Sarah Cushing?"

"She must live with the knowledge that her anger helped to create the storm. Yet the act itself was Browner's alone."

Holmes rose and walked to the window. The street below was quiet. A few people passed, unaware of the sorrow that had traveled through the post in a small box.

"It is a sad case," I said.

"Yes," Holmes answered. "There are crimes of cold reason, and there are crimes

of passion. The first are often easier to understand. The second are born from feelings that grow slowly and then burst without warning."

He turned back toward me.

"You see, Watson, this was never a foolish joke. It was a message from a broken man. That is why I rejected the medical student theory at once. There was too much emotion in it."

I thought of the quiet room in Croydon, of the small box upon the table, and of the pale face of Sarah Cushing.

"A simple error in an address," I said softly, "and the wrong sister received that terrible sign."

"Yes," Holmes replied. "Chance plays its part in all human affairs. Yet reason must still guide us through them."

The matter of the cardboard box was ended. James Browner would face the law. Mary Browner and the other victim lay silent in their graves. And the lesson remained clear to me, as so often before: behind even the smallest object may lie a deep and painful story, waiting only for careful eyes to uncover it.

The Yellow Face

Part 1

In the long list of cases in which I have seen my friend Sherlock Holmes employ his remarkable powers, there are some which show his success and others which show his limits. The case of what came to be known as "The Yellow Face" belongs to the latter kind, and for that reason it has always remained in my memory.

It was one quiet evening in Baker Street. The lamps were lit, and a soft rain fell outside. Holmes sat in his armchair with a book upon his knee, though I could see that he was not reading it closely. I was writing a letter at the table when Mrs. Hudson announced a visitor.

A tall and anxious-looking man entered. His face was pale, and his manner showed deep worry. He carried his hat tightly in his hands.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. Pray sit down,” Holmes replied calmly. “You appear troubled.”

“My name is Grant Munro,” the man said. “I live at Norbury. I have come to you because I am at my wits’ end.”

Holmes leaned back and joined his fingers. “Please tell us your difficulty.”

Munro took a deep breath. “It concerns my wife.”

Holmes nodded slightly. “Go on.”

“I married my wife three years ago. She was a widow. Her first husband died in America. She had suffered much and came back to England alone. We have been very happy together—until recently.”

His voice trembled slightly.

“What has changed?” Holmes asked.

“Two months ago she asked me for one hundred pounds. She would not tell me why she needed it. I trusted her and gave it to her, though the secrecy troubled me. Soon after, I noticed that she seemed uneasy. She would start at small sounds and often looked out of the window as if she feared something.”

Holmes listened without interruption.

“Near our house,” Munro continued, “there is a small cottage which had stood empty for some time. A few weeks ago, new tenants arrived. One night I happened to look toward that cottage and saw, at an upper window, a face—”

He stopped and shuddered slightly.

“A face?” Holmes prompted gently.

“Yes. A strange face. It was yellow—of a pale, unnatural color. It seemed to watch our house. I could not see it clearly, but it frightened me.”

“And you told your wife?”

“I did. To my surprise, she grew very upset and begged me not to speak of it again. Later, I saw her leave the house secretly and walk toward the cottage. I followed at a distance. She entered it.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened.

“You are certain it was your wife?”

“Quite certain. When she returned, I questioned her. She denied everything at

first, then admitted that she had been to the cottage but begged me not to inquire further. She said that it concerned something in her past and that I must trust her."

Munro's hands tightened.

"I love her deeply," he said. "But this secrecy is destroying me. I cannot sleep. I have gone again to the cottage and seen the same yellow face at the window. Once, when I approached the door, it was quickly shut."

"Have you spoken to the tenants?" Holmes asked.

"No. The door was never opened when I knocked."

"And your wife continues to visit?"

"Yes. She goes there when she believes I am absent. Yesterday I found that she had slipped out while I was at work. I followed again and saw her enter the cottage. I could bear it no longer. I came to you."

Holmes was silent for several moments. I could see that he was weighing each detail carefully.

"Mr. Munro," he said at last, "does your wife have any living relatives?"

"None in England. She told me that her first husband and their child died of yellow fever in America."

Holmes glanced quickly at me, but he did not speak.

"And you have no reason to doubt her affection for you?" he asked.

"None. She has always been kind and devoted."

Holmes rose and paced slowly across the room.

"This is a case," he said thoughtfully, "which appears simple on the surface but may hide deeper meaning. There are several possible explanations."

Munro leaned forward eagerly. "You believe that there is some innocent explanation?"

Holmes stopped before him.

"I believe that we must not assume guilt without proof. The yellow face may be nothing more than illness or disguise. Yet the secrecy is curious."

He turned to me.

"Watson, this case may test us."

Then to Munro he said, "We shall visit Norbury tomorrow. In the meantime,

observe carefully but do nothing rash. Do not confront your wife again tonight. Let us see with our own eyes."

Munro stood and grasped Holmes's hand.

"Thank you. I shall wait for you at the station in the morning."

When he had gone, I looked at Holmes with interest.

"What do you think?" I asked.

Holmes gave a small smile.

"I have formed a theory," he said quietly, "but I shall not share it yet. It may prove entirely wrong."

"Wrong?" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes, Watson. Even the most careful reasoning can fail when the facts are incomplete. Let us gather more light before we judge."

The rain continued to fall softly outside, and the quiet room seemed to hold a sense of mystery. I could not help but feel deep sympathy for Grant Munro. Love mixed with doubt is a painful burden. As I prepared for bed that night, I wondered what truth lay behind the pale yellow face at the window in Norbury.

Part 2

The next morning was clear and bright. Holmes and I traveled by train to Norbury, where Grant Munro was waiting for us on the platform. He looked even more worn than the night before. Dark circles lay under his eyes, and his manner was restless.

"You have not confronted your wife?" Holmes asked at once.

"No," Munro replied. "I followed your advice. She believes that I suspect nothing."

"Very good," Holmes said calmly. "Now, show us the cottage."

Norbury was a quiet place with small houses and green fields beyond them. Munro led us along a narrow road until we reached his own house. It stood neatly with a garden before it. A short distance away, partly hidden by trees, stood the cottage.

“There,” Munro said, pointing. “That is the place.”

Holmes studied it carefully. The cottage was small and plain. The windows were closed, and the curtains drawn. Nothing seemed unusual from the outside.

“When did you last see the face?” Holmes asked.

“Two nights ago. At the upper window.”

Holmes nodded. “And your wife is at home now?”

“Yes. She believes that I am at work.”

Holmes looked at me briefly. I could see that he was deep in thought.

“We shall first examine the cottage,” he said. “If no one answers, we shall wait.”

We walked toward the door. Munro knocked firmly. There was no answer. He knocked again, louder. Still no reply.

Holmes stepped forward and tried the handle. It was locked.

“The tenants are out,” he said quietly.

Munro’s face showed both relief and frustration. “They are careful,” he said. “They never open the door.”

Holmes stepped back and looked up at the windows. For a moment, all was still. Then, suddenly, at the upper window, a pale yellow face appeared behind the glass.

I started in surprise. It was indeed strange. The face seemed flat and of an unnatural color, almost like a mask. It looked down toward us without expression.

“There!” Munro cried in a low voice. “You see it!”

The face remained for a few seconds and then disappeared suddenly, as if drawn back.

Holmes’s eyes were sharp and steady. “Interesting,” he murmured.

“What can it be?” Munro asked in distress. “Is it illness? Or something worse?”

Holmes did not answer at once. He turned and began to walk slowly around the cottage, examining the ground and the garden. I followed him. Munro remained near the door, watching the window nervously.

Holmes stopped near a side path and looked at the soil.

“Fresh footprints,” he said softly. “Small ones.”

“Small?” I asked.

“Yes. Not the steps of a grown man.”

We returned to Munro.

“Mr. Munro,” Holmes said, “I believe that we must act quickly. The matter cannot continue in this way. Will you stand firm if we demand entrance?”

Munro drew a deep breath. “Yes. I must know the truth.”

Holmes nodded. “Then knock again.”

Munro struck the door loudly. After a moment we heard movement inside. The door opened slightly, and a woman stood before us. She was tall and thin, with a hard expression.

“What do you want?” she demanded.

“We wish to see the person in the upper room,” Holmes said calmly.

“There is no one you need concern yourself with,” she replied sharply.

Munro stepped forward. “My wife has been visiting this house. I demand to know why.”

The woman’s eyes flickered for a moment, then she tried to close the door. Munro placed his hand firmly against it.

“We shall enter,” Holmes said quietly.

For a moment there was tension. Then, as if deciding that resistance was useless, the woman stepped aside.

We entered the small hall and moved toward the staircase. Munro hurried ahead of us, driven by strong emotion. At the top of the stairs was a closed door.

“Open it,” Munro said in a low voice.

The woman hesitated, then turned the handle.

The room was simple and clean. Near the window stood a small figure dressed in white. It turned slowly toward us.

The face was yellow, smooth, and strange. But as we stepped closer, I saw that it was not a real face at all. It was a mask.

Munro gave a cry. “What is this?”

The small figure reached up and removed the mask.

Beneath it was the face of a child—a little girl with dark skin and bright eyes. She looked at us with fear but also with innocence.

At that moment, footsteps sounded behind us. We turned. Munro’s wife stood

in the doorway. Her face was pale with emotion.

"Stop!" she cried. "You must not frighten her!"

Munro stared from his wife to the child.

"What does this mean?" he asked hoarsely.

His wife came forward slowly.

"It means," she said softly, "that this is my child."

Silence filled the room.

"Your child?" Munro repeated.

"Yes. My daughter from my first marriage. She did not die, as I told you. She lives."

Munro stood as if struck. "But—you said—"

Tears filled her eyes.

"I was afraid," she whispered. "My first husband was a man of African blood. Our child inherited his dark skin. When he died, I feared that you would not accept her. I loved you, and I was weak. I left her in America with a trusted nurse. Later, I brought her here secretly."

She looked toward the child.

"The nurse and I took this cottage so that she might be near me. I wished to tell you, but I feared your reaction. The mask was used to hide her face from the window, so that no one would question."

Munro's face changed slowly. The anger and shock softened.

He stepped toward the child. She looked up at him with wide eyes.

"Is this true?" he asked his wife.

"Every word," she answered. "I have wronged you by hiding it. But I could not bear to lose you."

There was a long silence. Then Munro knelt before the child.

"You are her daughter," he said gently. "Then you are mine as well."

The child's face brightened with hope.

Munro rose and turned to his wife. "You should have trusted me," he said quietly. "But I forgive you."

She burst into tears and placed her hand in his.

Holmes stood beside me, silent and thoughtful.

As we left the cottage, Munro walked with his wife and the child between them. The mask lay forgotten upon the table.

On the train back to London, I looked at Holmes.

“You were prepared for this?” I asked.

Holmes shook his head slightly.

“I suspected some hidden family matter,” he said. “But I feared that my theory might be wrong. That is why I said that this case would test us.”

“You were nearly mistaken?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied calmly. “I had imagined something darker. Instead, we found fear and love.”

He looked out of the window at the passing fields.

“It is well, Watson, that we do not judge too quickly. Human hearts are often more complex than crime.”

I could not help but agree. In this case, there had been no villain, only misunderstanding and fear. And the strange yellow face had hidden not danger, but a child waiting to be loved.

Part 3

The train moved steadily toward London, and for some minutes neither of us spoke. The fields passed by in quiet green lines beneath the pale sky. Holmes sat with his head slightly bowed, his hands resting upon his knees. I knew that he was reviewing the case in his mind, testing each step once more.

“You see, Watson,” he said at last, “this is one of those occasions when my reasoning might easily have led me to injustice.”

“Injustice?” I repeated.

“Yes. When Mr. Munro first described the yellow face and the secret visits, I suspected betrayal. I imagined that his wife might be protecting another man, perhaps even involved in some form of deception for gain. The secrecy, the money, the strange tenant—all pointed in that direction.”

“It was a natural thought,” I said.

“Natural, yes. But not correct. The danger lies in allowing probability to harden into certainty before the facts are complete.”

He looked at me with a faint but serious expression.

“I told you that this case would test us. It tested me as well. Had I pressed my first theory too strongly, I might have caused great harm.”

I thought of Mrs. Munro’s pale face and the small child standing silently in the upper room.

“Her fear was powerful,” I said slowly.

“Indeed,” Holmes replied. “She feared that her husband would reject the child because of her appearance. Society is not always kind to difference. She chose secrecy over honesty. That choice created suspicion.”

“And the one hundred pounds?” I asked.

“For the child’s support and the cost of bringing her from America,” Holmes answered at once. “The nurse and the cottage required money. It was simple once the truth was revealed.”

I reflected upon the mask.

“The mask was an attempt to hide what she believed would not be accepted.”

“Exactly. The yellow face which so alarmed Mr. Munro was nothing more than painted cloth. It frightened him because it was unexplained. Mystery magnifies fear.”

The train slowed slightly as we approached a station. Holmes remained thoughtful.

“There is something important in this case,” he continued. “We often think that secrets hide crime. Sometimes they hide shame, or fear, or pain. It is our task to separate one from the other.”

“And today,” I said, “there was no crime.”

“No crime,” Holmes agreed. “Only a mistake of trust.”

We reached Baker Street in the early evening. The air was cooler now, and the streets were lively once more. As we entered our rooms, Holmes removed his coat and sat down with a long sigh.

“Watson,” he said, “when next you record my cases, you may include this one. It will serve as a reminder that even I may form an incorrect theory.”

I smiled slightly. “You solved the matter in the end.”

“Yes,” he said quietly. “But I came close to error. And that is worth remembering.”

He reached for his violin and drew the bow slowly across the strings. A gentle melody filled the room, softer than his usual strong notes. It seemed to carry something of relief within it.

As I sat listening, I thought of Grant Munro walking home beside his wife, the child’s small hand in his own. The fear which had darkened their house had lifted. In its place stood truth and acceptance.

The case of the yellow face did not end with arrest or punishment. It ended with understanding. For once, the strange figure at the window had hidden not danger, but love waiting to be claimed.

And I felt, as I often did after an investigation, that Holmes’s greatest gift was not only his sharp mind, but his willingness to follow truth wherever it led—even when it humbled him.

The Stockbroker’s Clerk

Part 1

It was during the summer of a certain year that a young man presented himself at our rooms in Baker Street with a problem which appeared at first simple, but which soon proved to be of a more serious nature. I remember that the morning was bright, and that Holmes was seated at the breakfast table when Mrs. Hudson announced the visitor.

The young man who entered was neatly dressed but pale and anxious. He held his hat in both hands and looked from Holmes to me with a mixture of hope and worry.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes?” he asked.

“Yes,” Holmes replied calmly. “Pray take a seat. You seem troubled.”

“My name is Hall Pycroft,” the young man said. “I am a clerk by trade, and until recently I was employed by a stockbroker in the City.”

Holmes leaned back slightly. “Please tell us the matter in full.”

Pycroft drew a deep breath.

“I was employed for several years at Coxon & Woodhouse, a firm of stockbrokers. They failed recently, and I lost my position. I searched for work for many weeks and at last obtained a place with a well-known firm named Mawson & Williams. The salary was modest, but it was honest work.”

Holmes nodded encouragingly.

“I was to begin on the following Monday. On Saturday evening, however, a gentleman came to my lodging. He had learned of my experience and said that my name had been recommended to him. He represented a company called the Franco-Midland Hardware Company Limited. He offered me a much higher salary and spoke of rapid advancement.”

“That must have pleased you,” I said.

“Indeed it did,” Pycroft answered. “He asked me questions about my past employment and appeared satisfied. He offered me five hundred pounds a year, which is far more than I expected. I accepted at once.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened slightly. “Five hundred pounds for a clerk? That is generous.”

“Yes,” Pycroft agreed. “He asked me to write out a statement in my own hand, giving details of my experience. He said that the company had large plans and that he wished to place me in a position of trust.”

“Did you write it?” Holmes asked.

“I did. He also gave me one hundred pounds in advance.”

Holmes raised his eyebrows but did not interrupt.

“He instructed me not to inform Mawson & Williams that I would not join them, but to let them suppose that I would begin work as agreed.”

Holmes sat upright at this point.

“That is curious,” he said quietly. “Did he explain why?”

“He said it was for business reasons and that he did not wish his rivals to know of his plans.”

“And you believed him?”

Pycroft looked embarrassed. “The money was strong proof, sir.”

Holmes gave a slight smile. “Go on.”

“He instructed me to travel to Birmingham and meet his brother, who was said to be the manager there. When I arrived, I found a small office with little furniture and few signs of activity. The brother received me warmly but kept me busy copying lists of names and addresses from a book.”

“What sort of book?” Holmes asked.

“A large directory. He told me that the company intended to open branches in many cities and required information.”

“Did you see any goods? Any hardware?” Holmes asked.

“No, sir. Nothing of the sort.”

Holmes exchanged a brief glance with me.

“Did the second man resemble the first?” he asked.

Pycroft hesitated.

“Yes,” he said slowly. “Very much. In fact, they looked almost the same. Only their hair was arranged differently.”

Holmes’s eyes grew bright with interest.

“And what troubled you?” he asked.

“Yesterday, as I was leaving the office, I saw in the newspaper that Mawson & Williams had been robbed. A large sum of money was stolen. The thief had been employed as a clerk and had vanished.”

Pycroft’s voice shook slightly.

“I suddenly feared that I had been used. That the man who took my place at Mawson & Williams was an impostor.”

Holmes stood up at once.

“Mr. Pycroft,” he said firmly, “you have been the victim of a clever scheme. The man who visited you required a sample of your handwriting in order to imitate it. He wished to take your position at Mawson & Williams under your name.”

Pycroft stared at him.

“Then the robbery—”

“Was likely committed by the same man,” Holmes finished calmly.

“What shall I do?” Pycroft asked.

Holmes turned to me.

“Watson, this promises to be of interest. We shall go to Birmingham at once.”

He faced Pycroft again.

“We must see these brothers with our own eyes. Do not return to them alone. We shall travel together.”

Pycroft rose with visible relief.

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes. I feared that I might be accused.”

Holmes shook his head slightly.

“You acted foolishly, perhaps, but not dishonestly. Now let us see how deep this deception runs.”

Within the hour, we were on our way to Birmingham, determined to uncover the truth behind the strange offer of employment and the robbery in the City.

Part 2

We reached Birmingham in the late afternoon. The town was busy and loud, very different from the quiet streets of Norbury we had visited not long before. Smoke hung in the air, and the sound of carts and voices filled the road. Hall Pycroft led us through several narrow streets until we came to a small office building in a less crowded part of the town.

“This is the place,” he said nervously.

The building was plain and somewhat neglected. A narrow stair led to the upper floor. There was no sign outside except a small card with the name “Franco-Midland Hardware Company Limited.” It appeared newly written.

Holmes examined the card closely.

“Fresh ink,” he murmured. “Very recent.”

We climbed the stairs. Pycroft knocked at the door. After a short pause, it was

opened by a man whom I recognized at once from Pycroft's description. He was of medium height, well dressed, and had sharp eyes. His hair was parted differently from that of the man who had first visited Pycroft, yet the resemblance was clear.

"Ah, Mr. Pycroft!" he said with forced cheerfulness. "You are punctual as always."

His eyes moved quickly to Holmes and me.

"These gentlemen?" he asked.

"Friends of mine," Pycroft replied. "They are interested in business."

The man hesitated only for a second before stepping aside.

"Pray come in."

The office was as Pycroft had described: a table, two chairs, a shelf with a few papers, and little else. No goods, no signs of real trade.

Holmes looked about calmly and then seated himself.

"We understand," he said lightly, "that your company has large plans."

The man smiled thinly. "Indeed we have. Expansion into many cities."

Holmes folded his hands. "Yet I see no samples, no goods, no clerks."

The smile faded slightly.

"We are in the early stages," the man replied.

Holmes rose and walked slowly toward the window.

"You have a brother in London?" he asked casually.

The man stiffened almost imperceptibly.

"Yes."

"Remarkable likeness between you," Holmes continued quietly.

"We are twins," the man answered quickly.

Holmes turned back toward him.

"Twins often share strong bonds," he said. "Strong enough to assist one another in difficult enterprises."

The man's face grew pale.

At that moment, from the street below, there came the sharp sound of a whistle and hurried footsteps. The man rushed to the window and looked out. His

expression changed at once to one of fear.

"What is the matter?" Pycroft asked.

The man turned toward us with wild eyes.

"It is nothing," he said, though his voice shook.

Holmes moved swiftly toward the door and placed his hand upon the handle.

"I believe it is something," he said firmly.

Before the man could react, there was a loud knock at the door. Holmes opened it. Two uniformed officers stood outside.

"We are looking for a man connected with the robbery at Mawson & Williams," one of them said.

The man in the room gave a cry and staggered backward. For a moment he seemed as if he would flee, but there was no escape.

"You are too late," he muttered strangely.

Suddenly he rushed toward an inner door which we had not noticed before. Holmes sprang after him, but the man was swift. He locked himself inside.

"Break it open!" Holmes cried.

The officers forced the door. We rushed in. The room was small and bare. The man lay upon the floor, unconscious. He had attempted to hang himself from a hook in the ceiling but had failed.

"He must have feared the gallows," Holmes said quietly.

The officers lifted the man and revived him. He was weak and shaken but alive.

"Where is your brother?" Holmes demanded.

The man gave a bitter laugh.

"My brother?" he said faintly. "He was arrested this morning in London. It is finished."

The truth was soon made clear. The two men were indeed brothers, but not honest businessmen. One had taken Hall Pycroft's place at Mawson & Williams, using the sample of handwriting to pass as him. While employed there, he had gained access to valuable securities and stolen a large sum of money. The second brother had remained in Birmingham to keep Pycroft occupied and away from London until the robbery was complete.

“The offer of five hundred pounds was bait,” Holmes explained to Pycroft as we stood aside while the officers secured the prisoner. “The one hundred pounds in advance ensured your silence. The copying of directories was mere pretence. The true purpose was to remove you from London and use your name.”

Pycroft looked pale but relieved.

“I am fortunate that the plan failed,” he said.

“Very fortunate,” Holmes agreed. “Had the robbery remained undiscovered longer, suspicion might have fallen upon you.”

We returned to our hotel that evening. The noise of the city seemed distant now that the matter was resolved.

“It was a clever scheme,” I said to Holmes.

“Yes,” he replied. “Simple, but bold. They required only time and a false identity. The likeness between the brothers made it possible.”

“And the whistle from the street?” I asked.

“Likely a signal from a lookout,” Holmes answered. “When he saw the police approach, he warned the man above. That is why he tried to take his own life.”

Holmes sat in silence for a moment.

“Crime often depends upon small details,” he said. “A sample of handwriting, a likeness of face, a moment’s delay. In this case, a young man’s doubt saved him.”

I thought of Hall Pycroft’s anxious face when he first entered our rooms in Baker Street. His suspicion had led him to seek help before it was too late.

“You have done well,” I said.

Holmes gave a slight shrug.

“The case required only swift action. Yet it shows again how easily an honest man may be drawn into danger through greed or carelessness.”

The next morning we returned to London. Hall Pycroft accompanied us to thank Holmes once more.

“I shall not forget this lesson,” he said earnestly.

“See that you do not,” Holmes replied kindly. “A large salary offered too quickly should always raise doubt.”

As we parted from him at the station, I reflected that the affair of the

stockbroker's clerk had begun with a simple offer of employment and had ended with arrest and disgrace. It was another example of how careful reasoning and timely intervention could prevent greater harm.

And once again I was reminded that in the busy world of commerce, deception may wear the face of opportunity, waiting for the unwary to accept it.

Part 3

When we reached Baker Street once more, Holmes removed his coat and sat quietly for several minutes without speaking. The journey had been long, yet his mind appeared more active than tired. I took my place opposite him and waited, knowing that he would soon review the case in his usual manner.

"Watson," he said at last, "what strikes you most about this affair?"

I considered for a moment.

"The boldness of it," I answered. "To take a man's name and position so calmly. And the resemblance between the brothers, which made the deception possible."

Holmes nodded.

"Yes. But there is another point. The scheme depended not upon violence, but upon confidence. They relied upon Mr. Pycroft's desire for advancement. A higher salary clouded his judgment."

"Many men would have accepted such an offer," I said.

"Quite so," Holmes replied. "That is why the trap was effective. It did not appear dangerous. It appeared fortunate."

He leaned back in his chair.

"Consider the steps. First, they identified a clerk recently out of work. Second, they obtained a sample of his handwriting under a false pretext. Third, one brother assumed his identity at Mawson & Williams. Meanwhile, the other kept the real Pycroft occupied in another city."

"And when the robbery was complete," I added, "they intended to disappear."

"Precisely," Holmes said. "Had not suspicion arisen quickly, the trail might have grown cold."

I thought again of the moment when the man in Birmingham saw the police approach and rushed toward the inner room.

“He chose death rather than arrest,” I said quietly.

Holmes’s expression grew thoughtful.

“Yes. That shows the pressure upon him. When a criminal plan collapses suddenly, fear may overcome reason. Yet even that action was imperfect. He lacked either the courage or the time to complete it.”

There was a pause.

“You believe the second brother will stand trial in London?” I asked.

“Without doubt. The evidence will be strong. The stolen securities will be traced. The false employment records will reveal the deception. Their likeness, which once aided them, will now link them together.”

Holmes rose and moved toward the window. Outside, the traffic of London passed as usual. The world seemed unchanged by the downfall of two men.

“It is curious,” he said quietly, “how often crime depends upon impersonation. A borrowed name, a false face, a forged hand. The world accepts what it expects to see.”

“And it is your task,” I said, “to see what others overlook.”

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Only to ask the proper question at the proper time.”

I could not help but reflect upon Hall Pycroft’s position. Had he not felt unease at the strange conditions of his new employment, he might have remained ignorant until suspicion fell upon him.

“His doubt saved him,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes agreed. “Instinct, when guided by reason, can be valuable. It led him to seek assistance rather than ignore the warning signs.”

Holmes resumed his seat and reached for his violin, but after a moment he set it down again.

“There is also a moral lesson,” he said.

“Which is?” I asked.

“That greed is not limited to criminals. It exists in honest men as well. The

difference lies in action. Mr. Pycroft desired success, but he did not choose dishonesty. The brothers desired wealth without effort, and so they embraced crime."

The room grew quiet. The afternoon light faded slowly as the day drew toward evening.

"Do you regret not discovering the scheme earlier?" I asked.

Holmes shook his head.

"We acted when the facts reached us. That is all that can be done. The law has taken its course."

He rose and stretched slightly.

"Watson, you may record this case among those where simple reasoning exposed a careful plan. It lacked the drama of some of our adventures, yet it shows clearly how deception may grow from ordinary circumstances."

I promised that I would do so.

As I look back upon the affair of the stockbroker's clerk, I recall most clearly the expression upon Hall Pycroft's face when he first sat before us—an expression of confusion mixed with fear. It changed to relief when the truth was revealed and the danger passed. His future, once uncertain, was restored.

The two brothers, by contrast, allowed ambition to blind them. Their cleverness might have served them well in honest trade. Instead, it led them to prison.

Thus ended a case that began with an offer of employment and ended with exposure and arrest. It reminded me once again that behind even the simplest business arrangement there may lie hidden design, and that careful inquiry is often the only safeguard against ruin.

The "Gloria Scott"

Part 1

It was during a quiet period in our life at Baker Street that I first heard from Sherlock Holmes the story of his earliest case. I had often wondered how his

remarkable powers of observation had first been recognized. One evening, when there was no client to occupy us, I asked him directly how he had begun his career.

Holmes smiled slightly at my question.

“It was not by design,” he said. “In fact, my first case came to me by chance when I was still at college. I had not yet considered that my abilities might form the basis of a profession.”

I leaned forward with interest.

“Tell me the story,” I said.

Holmes rose and took from a drawer a small paper which had grown worn with age.

“This,” he said, “was the beginning.”

He seated himself again and began his account.

“When I was at college, I had few friends. I preferred study and solitary walks to the noisy life of other students. One day, while walking near the chapel, I saw a man struck violently by a cricket ball. I assisted him to his feet and escorted him to his rooms. That man was Victor Trevor.”

Holmes’s voice was calm as he continued.

“From that small incident grew a friendship. Trevor was the son of a country gentleman who lived in Norfolk. During the holidays, he invited me to visit his father at their estate.”

“You accepted?” I asked.

“Yes. I had little to detain me in town, and the quiet of the country appealed to me at the time. The Trevor house stood in a pleasant region near the coast. It was large but not grand. Victor welcomed me warmly, and I soon found his father to be a man of strong character and curious habits.”

Holmes paused briefly.

“Mr. Trevor the elder was a widower. He had spent many years abroad and had made a fortune in gold fields. Though he appeared cheerful, there was about him a certain restlessness, as if he carried a secret weight.”

“You noticed this at once?” I asked.

Holmes nodded.

“It was in small things. He started at sudden sounds. He watched strangers carefully. His hands bore marks not consistent with the life he claimed. The ears were pierced, as if he had once worn earrings. His arms showed signs of hard labor.”

I smiled slightly. “You could not resist drawing conclusions.”

Holmes allowed himself a faint expression of amusement.

“It was simply habit. One evening, while seated after dinner, Mr. Trevor turned suddenly to me and asked what I could deduce about him.”

“A dangerous invitation,” I remarked.

“Indeed. I answered honestly. I told him that he had once been closely associated with someone whose initials were ‘J.A.’ I inferred this from a tattoo upon his arm, partly erased. I added that he had been in the gold fields and had traveled in New Zealand and Japan.”

“And how did he react?”

Holmes’s expression grew more serious.

“He rose from his chair and nearly fell. His face turned pale. For a moment I feared that I had caused him serious harm. He recovered, however, and laughed it off before his son. But from that night forward, he watched me with new attention.”

“Your words touched something hidden,” I said quietly.

“Yes. I realized that my observations had struck close to a secret.”

For several weeks, nothing further occurred. Holmes described days spent walking along the coast with Victor Trevor and evenings in quiet conversation. Yet beneath the calm lay tension.

“One afternoon,” Holmes continued, “a letter arrived for Mr. Trevor. It bore a foreign stamp. When he read it, his face changed. He seemed shaken.”

“Did he share its contents?” I asked.

“No. But that evening, a visitor arrived—a rough-looking man with a harsh voice. His name was Hudson.”

Holmes’s tone sharpened slightly as he spoke the name.

“Hudson was a sailor by appearance. He claimed to have known Mr. Trevor in earlier days. At first he was received coldly, but soon he was invited to stay.”

“Why?” I asked.

“That was the strange part. Mr. Trevor appeared fearful of him. Hudson’s manner grew bold and even insolent. He spoke carelessly and made demands. Yet the elder Trevor endured it.”

I felt a sense of unease.

“You believed Hudson had knowledge of the past?”

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “He held power over Mr. Trevor through some secret. Victor, however, remained ignorant of its nature.”

Holmes leaned back slightly.

“Hudson soon behaved as if master of the house. He drank freely and spoke rudely. At last he quarreled openly with Mr. Trevor and departed suddenly.”

“Was that the end of it?” I asked.

“No. A letter arrived soon after Hudson’s departure. When Mr. Trevor read it, he gave a cry and fell unconscious.”

Holmes’s voice grew quieter.

“He was carried to his room. Though he recovered briefly, he never regained full strength. Before his death, he handed his son a paper and instructed him to seek my help if needed.”

“And did Victor come to you?”

“Yes. Some weeks later he brought me the paper. It contained a strange message written in simple words but arranged oddly.”

Holmes unfolded the old sheet he had taken from the drawer.

“It appeared meaningless at first glance,” he said. “But it concealed a warning.”

I watched him with growing interest. The tale of his first case was unfolding slowly, and I sensed that the true mystery lay in the message that had struck fear into the heart of Mr. Trevor.

“What did the message say?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“That, Watson, is where the real story begins.”

Part 2

Holmes placed the worn paper upon the table between us.

“The message read as follows,” he said. “ ‘The supply of game for London is going steadily up. Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasants.’ ”

I looked at him in surprise.

“That seems like a simple note about hunting,” I said.

“So it appears,” Holmes replied. “But Victor Trevor assured me that when his father read those words, he turned pale and fell as if struck. Therefore the message must conceal something more.”

“A hidden code?” I asked.

“Precisely. The words themselves are harmless. The meaning lies beneath.”

Holmes explained that he studied the sentence carefully, looking for pattern and order.

“At first I examined every third word,” he said. “Then every second. It was not difficult once I applied method.”

He leaned forward slightly.

“Taking every third word beginning with the first, the message becomes: ‘The game is up. Hudson has told all. Fly for your life.’ ”

I felt a sudden chill.

“That is clear enough,” I said.

“Yes. It was a warning. Hudson had revealed the secret. Mr. Trevor knew that his past had caught up with him.”

“And the letter came from where?”

“From a man named Beddoes,” Holmes replied. “Victor Trevor knew him as an old friend of his father. He lived in Hampshire.”

Holmes then continued the story as he had once told it to me.

“After his father’s death, Victor came to me with the coded message. He feared that the warning concerned some crime long hidden. He also showed me a paper left by his father, containing a full confession.”

Holmes’s voice grew steady and serious.

“The elder Trevor was not always known by that name. Many years before, he had been a man called James Armitage. He had been convicted of a crime and sentenced to transportation.”

“Transportation?” I repeated.

“Yes. He was sent aboard a prison ship named the Gloria Scott, bound for Australia.”

Holmes paused for a moment, as if recalling the scene.

“The Gloria Scott carried many prisoners. Among them was a clever and dangerous man named Prendergast. He had hidden money and influence, even in chains. Through bribery and secret planning, he arranged a mutiny aboard the ship.”

“A mutiny?” I said.

“Yes. With the help of a few prisoners and corrupt sailors, he seized control of the vessel. The officers were overpowered. The captain and several others were killed.”

I listened with deep interest.

“James Armitage—later known as Mr. Trevor—did not lead the mutiny,” Holmes continued. “But he was among those who survived when the ship was taken.”

“What became of the Gloria Scott?” I asked.

“During the chaos, a struggle broke out. There was gunfire. In the confusion, the ship caught fire and later exploded. Most aboard were killed. Only a small group escaped in a boat.”

“Including Armitage?”

“Yes. He and a few others, among them Beddoes and Hudson, survived. They were rescued later and assumed new identities. Believed dead, they began new lives in England.”

I began to see the shape of the matter.

“So Hudson was one of the survivors.”

“Exactly,” Holmes replied. “A sailor who had joined the mutiny and lived. He discovered Armitage’s new identity years later and chose to use it for his own

gain."

"Blackmail," I said quietly.

"Yes. Hudson held the power to expose the past. Mr. Trevor feared not only disgrace but also the possible reopening of old charges."

Holmes folded the paper carefully.

"When Hudson left the Trevor estate in anger, he went to Beddoes and likely threatened him as well. Beddoes sent the coded warning: 'The game is up.' That message struck Mr. Trevor's heart like a blow."

I reflected upon the picture of the proud country gentleman living quietly in Norfolk, carrying the burden of a violent past.

"Did Hudson succeed in exposing them?" I asked.

Holmes shook his head.

"No. After the warning was sent, Beddoes disappeared. Hudson, too, vanished. It is believed that Hudson died soon after under uncertain circumstances. The secret died with those who held it."

"And Victor Trevor?" I asked.

"He inherited his father's estate and lived quietly. The past did not return."

Holmes leaned back in his chair.

"That was my first case, Watson. It taught me that beneath calm respectability may lie the most dramatic history. A simple sentence about game and pheasants concealed life and death."

I looked at him with admiration.

"You uncovered a hidden confession and a story of mutiny from a few strange words."

Holmes gave a small shrug.

"The code was simple. The true mystery lay not in solving it, but in understanding its weight."

The fire burned low as he finished his account. I felt that I had glimpsed not only a story of crime but also the beginning of Holmes's path as a consulting detective.

"And from that moment," I said, "you saw that your powers might serve others."

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Yes. It was then that I realized that observation and reasoning could uncover truths long buried. The Gloria Scott showed me that even the past, thought lost at sea, may one day return.”

Part 3

Holmes remained silent for some moments after finishing the main outline of the affair. The old paper lay folded upon the table, its edges worn by time. I could see that the case held special meaning for him, not because it was the most difficult, but because it had shaped his future.

“There was one more detail,” he said at last. “After I decoded the message, Victor Trevor showed me his father’s written confession in full. It described not only the mutiny but the moral struggle that followed.”

“Moral struggle?” I asked.

“Yes. Though he had been a convict, Armitage was not a violent man by nature. When the mutiny began, he was forced to choose between death and cooperation. Refusal would have meant being thrown overboard with the loyal crew. He chose survival.”

Holmes spoke in a calm, measured tone.

“The ship became a scene of chaos. Prendergast, who had led the rebellion, was ruthless. He killed without hesitation. Armitage and Beddoes tried to distance themselves from further bloodshed, but events moved quickly. When the explosion destroyed the ship, it ended not only the voyage but the power of Prendergast.”

“And afterward,” I said, “they created new lives.”

“Yes. They reached England quietly. Believed lost at sea, they were free to begin again. Armitage became Trevor. Beddoes kept his name but avoided attention. Hudson, however, lacked restraint.”

Holmes’s expression hardened slightly.

“Hudson possessed neither wisdom nor gratitude. Instead of valuing his second

chance, he sought advantage. When he recognized Trevor years later, he realized that he held a weapon."

"The threat of exposure," I said.

"Exactly. A man who has built a new life upon a hidden past is vulnerable to such threat. Hudson used it to demand money and privilege."

"Why did Trevor not confess everything to his son?" I asked.

Holmes considered.

"Pride, perhaps. Or the wish to protect his son from shame. To reveal the truth would have destroyed the image of honor he had built. Instead, he endured Hudson's presence in silence."

I thought of the uneasy behavior Holmes had described during his visit to Norfolk—the nervous glances, the sudden fear.

"When Hudson left in anger," I said, "Trevor must have known that exposure was near."

"Yes," Holmes replied. "That is why Beddoes sent the coded message. He had likely been approached as well. He warned his old companion that the secret could no longer be contained."

Holmes's gaze grew distant.

"The shock was too great for Trevor. Though no public disgrace followed, the weight of fear ended his strength."

I reflected upon the strange chain of events: a mutiny at sea, a hidden identity, a sailor turned blackmailer, and finally a coded message about pheasants and fly-paper.

"It is remarkable," I said, "that such a small line concealed so much."

Holmes nodded.

"That was my lesson. Words may hide truth in plain sight. A code may be simple, yet the meaning behind it may be heavy with consequence."

"Did you ever encounter Beddoes again?" I asked.

"No. He vanished from Hampshire shortly after the message. It is believed that he fled abroad, fearing that Hudson would expose him. Whether he found peace, I cannot say."

“And Hudson?”

“He was last reported to have sailed once more. Some say he died at sea. It would be fitting.”

Holmes rose and placed the old paper back into his drawer.

“The case of the Gloria Scott was not one of detection in the ordinary sense. There was no villain to arrest, no court to attend. It was the uncovering of a past long buried.”

He turned toward me.

“Yet it showed me that my method had value. I saw that careful observation could pierce secrecy. From that time onward, I began to shape my life toward that end.”

I regarded him thoughtfully.

“So your career began not with triumph, but with revelation.”

Holmes smiled slightly.

“Yes. With revelation—and with humility. I had not meant to disturb the elder Trevor. My curiosity touched a wound he had long concealed. It taught me that truth, though powerful, must be handled with care.”

The room was quiet except for the faint sound of traffic in Baker Street below.

“You have solved many greater puzzles since then,” I said.

“Perhaps,” Holmes replied. “But each has roots in that first experience. The recognition that beneath calm appearance there may lie storm and violence.”

He seated himself once more and folded his hands.

“Remember this, Watson: a man’s present does not always reveal his past. And sometimes, the most respectable face may have once stood amid chaos.”

I could not disagree. The story of the Gloria Scott remained with me long after that evening. It revealed not only a hidden mutiny, but also the birth of Sherlock Holmes as the consulting detective whom the world would come to know.

Thus ended his account of the case that first showed him the power of his own mind—a power that would, in time, illuminate countless other mysteries.

The Musgrave Ritual

Part 1

An incident from my friend Sherlock Holmes's early life comes to my mind when I think of the curious matters that shaped his career. Among them, few are stranger than the affair known as "The Musgrave Ritual." It occurred during his university days, before he had fully chosen his path as a consulting detective.

One winter evening in Baker Street, when the wind moved softly against the window and the fire burned low, Holmes spoke of it. He had been sorting old papers when he paused and drew out a faded document.

"This," he said quietly, "is connected with one of my earliest investigations."

I leaned forward with interest.

"Tell me," I said.

Holmes settled into his chair and began.

"At college, I was acquainted with a young man named Reginald Musgrave. He came from an old and noble family. Their estate lay in Sussex, and it was known for its long history. Musgrave himself was intelligent and curious, though less inclined to study than I."

Holmes paused briefly.

"Some years after we left university, Musgrave came to me in distress. He had heard that I had begun to apply my powers of reasoning to practical problems. His difficulty concerned the disappearance of a trusted servant."

"A servant?" I asked.

"Yes. The butler of the Musgrave household, a man named Brunton. He had served the family for many years and was regarded as capable and clever."

Holmes continued in a steady tone.

"Brunton was discovered one night in the library, examining a document which he had no right to see. When confronted by Musgrave, he appeared deeply disturbed and begged forgiveness. He was dismissed from service but allowed to remain in the house for a short period before departure."

"And then he vanished?" I said.

“Precisely. On the morning he was to leave, he was gone. His room showed signs of disorder. His clothes were missing, but certain personal items remained. No one had seen him depart.”

“Suspicious indeed,” I remarked.

Holmes nodded.

“Musgrave suspected foul play or self-destruction, but no evidence supported either theory. Shortly afterward, another servant—a maid—also disappeared. Her name was Rachel Howells.”

“Two disappearances,” I said thoughtfully.

“Yes. Rachel had been deeply attached to Brunton. When he was dismissed, she grew pale and silent. The day after Brunton vanished, she too was gone.”

Holmes leaned slightly forward.

“Musgrave feared scandal and sought my assistance. I traveled at once to his estate.”

I could almost picture the old house as Holmes described it.

“The Musgrave estate was ancient,” he continued. “Large halls, heavy furniture, portraits of ancestors upon the walls. It carried the weight of centuries.”

“And the document Brunton had examined?” I asked.

Holmes held up the faded paper.

“It was known as the Musgrave Ritual. A family tradition passed down from generation to generation. It took the form of a series of questions and answers.”

“A ritual?” I repeated.

“Yes. It was recited by each head of the family upon coming of age. Musgrave regarded it as a relic of the past with no practical meaning.”

Holmes unfolded the paper and recited from memory:

“ ‘Whose was it?’ ‘His who is gone.’

‘Who shall have it?’ ‘He who will come.’

‘Where was the sun?’ ‘Over the oak.’

‘Where was the shadow?’ ‘Under the elm.’ ”

The questions continued, each followed by a brief answer, giving directions by steps and measures.

“It resembles a set of instructions,” I observed.

“Exactly,” Holmes replied. “When I read it, I believed that it concealed something more than ceremony.”

He explained that the estate grounds once contained a large oak tree and an elm. The elm had been cut down years earlier, but its position was known.

“I began by locating the exact spot where the oak had stood at the time the ritual was first composed,” Holmes said. “The questions about the sun and shadow suggested measurement.”

“You believed it was a map,” I said.

“Yes. A map expressed in words.”

Holmes described how he calculated the length of the shadow cast by the oak at a certain hour, as specified in the ritual.

“By placing a rod where the oak once stood and measuring its shadow in proportion to the tree’s height, I determined the direction indicated.”

I admired the precision of his method.

“And where did it lead?” I asked.

Holmes’s eyes grew intent.

“To a point near the old cellar beneath the house.”

The matter was becoming clearer. Brunton had discovered that the ritual was not mere tradition but a guide to hidden treasure.

“Brunton must have realized the same,” I said.

“Indeed,” Holmes replied. “He was a clever man. On the night he was found in the library, he was studying the ritual. After dismissal, he likely attempted to follow its instructions in secret.”

Holmes described how he and Musgrave searched the cellar area. They found signs that a large stone slab had been moved.

“Beneath it was a small chamber,” Holmes continued. “In that chamber lay the remains of Brunton.”

I felt a sudden shock.

“Dead?”

“Yes. He had descended into the chamber, likely to retrieve whatever lay within.

But the heavy stone had fallen back into place. He was trapped."

"And the maid, Rachel?" I asked.

Holmes's voice grew somber.

"Rachel had followed him. Perhaps she assisted him in moving the stone. When Brunton was trapped, she may have lacked the strength to lift it again. In her despair, she fled."

"Was she found?"

"Her body was later discovered in a nearby lake. It appeared that grief and fear had overcome her."

I sat back, deeply moved.

"What was in the chamber?" I asked quietly.

Holmes's expression changed slightly.

"An old metal chest. Inside were coins and ornaments, ancient and worn. They were relics of the time of King Charles the First. It is believed that the Musgrave family had hidden royal treasures during a period of political unrest."

The ritual, then, had been a guide to a hidden royal deposit, preserved through generations without full understanding.

Holmes folded the faded paper carefully.

"Thus ended the Musgrave affair. A ritual once thought meaningless proved to be a map. A clever servant paid for his ambition with his life."

I looked at Holmes thoughtfully.

"It was not crime in the usual sense," I said.

"No," he replied. "It was greed and secrecy combined with ancient mystery."

The firelight flickered across the room as he placed the document aside.

"That case," he added quietly, "showed me how the past may hide within tradition, waiting only for reason to uncover it."

The Reigate Squires

Part 1

It was shortly after my return from one of my military duties that I found Holmes in a state of unusual weakness. He had recently completed a difficult investigation and had worked without rest for many days. The strain had affected him deeply. Though he tried to conceal it, I could see that his nerves were shaken and his strength reduced.

I urged him strongly to leave London for a time and seek fresh air and quiet. At last he agreed, though not without reluctance. A friend of mine, Colonel Hayter, who lived near Reigate in Surrey, had invited us to stay at his house. I believed that the country would restore Holmes's health.

We arrived at Colonel Hayter's home in the early afternoon. It was a pleasant country house, surrounded by trees and open fields. The air was clean, and the stillness of the place seemed far removed from the noise of London.

Holmes lay upon a sofa in the sitting-room and closed his eyes.

"Watson," he said quietly, "you must promise that you will not allow me to involve myself in any local matters. I am here to rest."

"You have my word," I replied.

Yet fate had other plans.

That very evening, during dinner, Colonel Hayter mentioned a recent event in the neighborhood.

"There has been a burglary at the house of Mr. Acton," he said. "A strange affair. The thieves took little of value—some papers and a few small objects."

Holmes opened his eyes but said nothing.

"And only yesterday," the Colonel continued, "a worse crime occurred. Mr. Cunningham, one of the local squires, was attacked during the night. His coachman was shot and killed."

Holmes sat upright at once.

"Shot?" he repeated.

"Yes," said the Colonel. "The intruder fled. The Cunninghams claim that they surprised a burglar in the act."

I gave Holmes a warning glance, but I could already see the familiar light returning to his eyes.

“What was taken?” he asked quietly.

“Nothing of importance, it seems. The house was disturbed, but little was missing.”

Holmes leaned back slowly.

“Strange,” he murmured. “A burglary in which nothing is taken. Then a second, more violent attempt.”

I placed my hand gently upon his arm.

“Holmes, you promised—”

He smiled faintly.

“Yes, Watson. I shall rest. It is merely curiosity.”

The next morning, however, Inspector Forrester arrived to consult Colonel Hayter. He brought news of the investigation. Holmes could not resist listening.

“The Cunninghams,” said the Inspector, “state that they were awakened by noise. The father saw a man fleeing through the garden. The son pursued him but was too late. The coachman lay dead.”

“Was anything found?” Holmes asked.

“Only a torn piece of paper in the dead man’s hand,” Forrester replied. “It appears to be part of a note.”

Holmes’s expression sharpened.

“May I see it?”

The Inspector hesitated but handed over the fragment.

Holmes studied it carefully. It contained only a few words and appeared to be part of a larger message.

“This is important,” Holmes said quietly. “The dead man grasped it tightly. It suggests that he met someone intentionally.”

“You believe he was not merely surprised by a burglar?” I asked.

Holmes shook his head slightly.

“No. This paper indicates arrangement, not chance.”

Though still pale, he rose and insisted upon visiting the Cunningham estate.

“For exercise,” he said lightly. “The fresh air will do me good.”

We walked the short distance to the Cunningham house. It stood solid and

respectable, with wide lawns before it. Mr. Cunningham, an older man with a firm expression, greeted us. His son Alec stood beside him, younger and more restless.

"We have nothing to hide," said the elder Cunningham. "The villain escaped."

Holmes moved slowly through the grounds, examining the path where the intruder had supposedly fled. He studied the marks upon the grass and the position of the windows.

"You saw the man clearly?" Holmes asked.

"Only his back," the father replied. "He ran swiftly."

"And you pursued?" Holmes asked the son.

"Yes," Alec said. "But he was too fast."

Holmes nodded thoughtfully.

He requested to see the room where the disturbance had occurred. Inside, drawers were opened, and papers scattered.

"Much disorder," Holmes murmured. "Yet little taken."

As he moved about the room, he suddenly staggered and fell heavily to the floor.

"Holmes!" I cried.

He lay still for a moment. The Cunninghams rushed forward in concern.

After a short time, Holmes sat up slowly.

"It is nothing," he said faintly. "Merely weakness from overwork."

Yet I noticed a strange brightness in his eyes.

Soon afterward, he made an odd request.

"Might I trouble you for pen and paper?" he asked Mr. Cunningham.

"Certainly," the man replied.

Holmes began to write, then paused deliberately.

"Forgive me," he said. "Would you kindly add the time and date here?"

He handed the paper to Mr. Cunningham, who complied without hesitation.

Holmes accepted it and rose to his feet.

"Thank you," he said calmly. "I believe I have seen enough."

As we departed, I turned to him in confusion.

"What was the purpose of that?" I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“To obtain a sample of handwriting,” he said quietly. “And to test a suspicion.”

Though he appeared weak in body, I could tell that his mind was once again fully engaged. The quiet countryside of Reigate had not given him rest. Instead, it had offered another mystery.

And I sensed that beneath the surface of this supposed burglary lay a darker truth.

Part 2

When we had walked some distance from the Cunningham house, I turned to Holmes with deep concern.

“You should not exert yourself so,” I said. “Your strength is not yet restored.”

He waved the remark aside.

“My dear Watson, the mind may act even when the body is weak. I assure you that I am quite equal to this matter.”

“And what is your suspicion?” I asked.

Holmes stopped and faced me.

“The burglary at Mr. Acton’s house and the attack upon the Cunninghams are connected.”

“Connected?” I repeated.

“Yes. Consider: in both cases, little of value was taken. Papers were disturbed, yet no significant property was stolen. That suggests that the object sought was a particular document.”

“A document?” I said thoughtfully.

“Precisely. Something specific, not general plunder.”

We returned to Colonel Hayter’s house, where Inspector Forrester soon joined us. Holmes asked him several questions in a calm but pointed manner.

“The piece of paper found in the dead man’s hand—have you compared it to any known writing?” Holmes inquired.

“Not yet,” the Inspector replied. “It is only a fragment.”

“May I examine it again?” Holmes asked.

Forrester handed it over. Holmes laid it beside the sheet he had obtained from Mr. Cunningham earlier that day.

“Observe,” he said quietly.

I looked closely. Though the torn fragment contained only a few words, the shape of the letters bore resemblance to the writing on the Cunningham note.

“The same hand?” I asked.

“The same,” Holmes replied. “Or at least closely related.”

Inspector Forrester frowned.

“You suspect the Cunninghams themselves?”

Holmes’s expression grew firm.

“Yes.”

There was silence in the room.

“But why should they stage such an affair?” I asked.

“That is the heart of it,” Holmes answered. “Let us reason step by step. The dead man, the coachman, held a fragment of a note. The torn edge suggests that the remainder was in the possession of another party.”

“And that party,” I said slowly, “may have been the Cunninghams.”

“Exactly,” Holmes replied. “Suppose that the coachman had knowledge of some matter which could damage the Cunninghams. Suppose he arranged to meet someone late at night. A quarrel follows. A shot is fired. The Cunninghams then attempt to disguise the event as a burglary.”

Inspector Forrester looked troubled.

“It is a bold accusation,” he said.

“It is a reasoned conclusion,” Holmes answered calmly. “The disorder in the room was theatrical. The story of the fleeing stranger is convenient. Most telling of all is the handwriting.”

“But how did you obtain that sample?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“By pretending weakness. When I requested that Mr. Cunningham add the date and time to my paper, I gave him opportunity to write naturally. The comparison with the fragment confirms my belief.”

“Then the torn paper was written by Mr. Cunningham?” the Inspector asked.

“By one of the two,” Holmes said. “Likely father and son both had involvement. Their hands are similar.”

Inspector Forrester rose at once.

“We must act.”

Holmes stood as well, though I could see the effort cost him.

“We shall confront them together,” he said.

That afternoon we returned to the Cunningham estate. The father and son received us with visible irritation.

“This is becoming tiresome,” said the elder Cunningham.

Holmes’s voice was calm but firm.

“Your patience will be rewarded, sir. I believe we have found the missing portion of a certain note.”

Alec Cunningham’s face changed color slightly.

“What note?” he demanded.

Holmes held up the fragment.

“The piece found in the dead man’s hand. It matches your handwriting.”

The room grew tense.

“That is absurd,” said the father sharply.

Holmes moved toward the desk.

“Then perhaps you will not object to allowing us to search this room.”

Alec suddenly stepped forward, his eyes flashing.

“This is outrageous!”

At that moment Holmes moved swiftly toward a writing table. In the drawer he found a folded paper. He opened it. It matched the torn fragment perfectly.

“Here is the remainder,” he said quietly.

Inspector Forrester seized the younger Cunningham as he lunged forward in anger. The elder man sank into a chair.

The note, when read in full, revealed that the coachman had summoned Mr. Cunningham to meet him at midnight. It appeared that he possessed knowledge of some legal dispute involving the neighboring estate of Mr. Acton. The

Cunninghams had likely sought certain papers during the earlier burglary at Acton's house, hoping to strengthen their position in a property dispute.

When the coachman discovered the truth and attempted to confront them, he paid with his life.

"The burglary at Acton's was meant to obtain a document," Holmes said calmly. "The coachman knew too much. He arranged a meeting. In the struggle, he was shot. The scene was arranged to resemble a burglary."

Inspector Forrester secured both father and son.

As we left the house, I turned to Holmes with admiration.

"Even in weakness," I said, "you have uncovered the truth."

Holmes smiled faintly, though I could see fatigue upon his face.

"The truth was there to be found," he replied. "One need only observe carefully."

When we returned to Colonel Hayter's house, Holmes at last allowed himself to rest.

"Now," he said quietly as he lay upon the sofa, "perhaps I may recover in peace."

The quiet fields of Reigate once again lay calm beneath the evening sky. Yet beneath that calm had been concealed greed and violence.

And I reflected that even in convalescence, Sherlock Holmes could not resist the call of reason when injustice demanded light.

Part 3

Holmes lay back upon the sofa at Colonel Hayter's house, clearly exhausted now that the excitement of the arrest had passed. The strain of the past days had returned to him, and I insisted that he rest without further discussion of the case. He did not protest.

"You are right, Watson," he said quietly. "The body must sometimes claim its due."

Yet before sleep took him, he spoke once more of the matter.

"It was a fortunate accident that I obtained that sample of writing," he said. "Had Mr. Cunningham refused to write, the proof would have been weaker."

“Your fainting fit,” I said, looking at him closely. “Was it entirely real?”

A faint smile touched his lips.

“Partly,” he admitted. “I was indeed weak. But I allowed myself to fall at a convenient moment.”

I could not help but shake my head.

“Even in illness, you plan ahead.”

“Habit,” he replied softly.

He closed his eyes, and soon he slept deeply.

In the days that followed, Holmes regained his strength gradually. The fresh country air and quiet surroundings aided his recovery. Colonel Hayter was deeply grateful for the resolution of the affair, for suspicion had weighed heavily upon the neighborhood.

Inspector Forrester later confirmed that the Cunninghams had confessed when confronted with the complete note. The dispute with Mr. Acton over certain legal documents had driven them to desperate measures. Their attempt to retrieve papers secretly had led first to burglary, then to murder.

“A sad case,” I remarked to Holmes one afternoon as we walked slowly along a country path.

“Yes,” he said. “Pride and greed often disguise themselves as respectability. The Cunninghams were men of standing. Yet they allowed their fear of loss to guide them.”

“The coachman paid dearly,” I added.

“He did,” Holmes replied gravely. “He appears to have discovered their wrongdoing and sought to use it, perhaps for his own advantage. That sealed his fate.”

I reflected upon the small details that had broken the case open: the torn paper, the unnatural disorder in the room, the suspicious timing of events.

“It seemed so simple in the end,” I said.

Holmes shook his head slightly.

“It was simple because the guilty attempted to construct a false narrative. They relied upon the idea of a common burglar. But the details betrayed them. When

little is stolen, one must ask why. When a note is torn, one must ask what remains."

He paused and looked toward the distant fields.

"The smallest fragment may hold the key."

A few days later, we returned to London. Holmes was much improved, though still pale. As we entered our rooms in Baker Street, he glanced about with a familiar expression.

"There is no place like home," he said quietly.

I smiled.

"And no place where crime will leave you in peace for long."

He gave a soft laugh.

"Perhaps not. Yet I am grateful that even during weakness, the mind remained clear. That is comfort enough."

The affair of the Reigate squires soon passed from public attention, but it remained in my memory as an example of Holmes's resolve. Even when his health faltered, his reasoning did not.

It showed me that his gift was not dependent upon physical strength. It lay in careful thought, in calm analysis, and in the courage to follow truth where it led—even into the homes of respected men.

And so our brief visit to Surrey, intended for rest, became instead another chapter in the long record of Sherlock Holmes's investigations—one more proof that justice may rise from the smallest clue, and that no mask of respectability can withstand the light of reason for long.

The Crooked Man

Part 1

It was one summer evening, when the air in Baker Street was warm and still, that Holmes received a visitor whose story proved both strange and tragic. I remember that the light from the setting sun fell across the room as Mrs. Hudson announced the arrival of a gentleman from the country.

The man who entered was Colonel James Barclay, a distinguished officer known for his service in India. His face bore marks of strain and sorrow.

“Mr. Holmes,” he began, “I seek your help in a matter that concerns my honor and the reputation of my household.”

Holmes gestured for him to sit.

“Pray speak freely,” he said calmly.

Colonel Barclay took a deep breath.

“It concerns my wife.”

Holmes inclined his head slightly.

“Go on.”

“My wife, Nancy Barclay, and I have been married many years. We met during my service in India. She was the daughter of a sergeant in my regiment. Our marriage was a happy one.”

His voice faltered.

“Until recently?”

“Yes,” the Colonel replied. “Two nights ago, after a meeting of a local society, she returned home greatly disturbed. She locked herself in the morning-room. I followed her, wishing to know what troubled her.”

“And what occurred?” Holmes asked.

“I heard raised voices,” Barclay said. “She spoke with anger, using words I had never heard from her before. I could not make out all of it, but I heard my own name spoken with hatred.”

Holmes leaned forward.

“Did you enter the room?”

“I attempted to. The door was locked. Shortly afterward, there was a cry. When the servants forced the door, they found me unconscious upon the floor. My wife lay dead.”

I started in surprise.

“Dead?”

“Yes. There were signs of shock. I myself recall little. I believe I fainted.”

Holmes’s expression remained steady.

“And was there anyone else in the room?”

“The servants insist that no one was seen entering or leaving.”

“Were there signs of struggle?” Holmes asked.

“The furniture was disturbed. A small wooden club was found near my body. I cannot explain its presence.”

Holmes rose slowly.

“You have been accused?” he asked quietly.

“Suspicion has fallen upon me,” Barclay admitted. “But I swear to you, I loved my wife. I would never harm her.”

Holmes regarded him thoughtfully.

“You served in India,” he said. “Did anything occur in your past which might return to trouble you?”

Barclay hesitated.

“Nothing that I know of.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“We shall visit your home at once.”

The following day, we traveled to the town where the Barclays resided. Their house was comfortable and well kept. The servants received us with anxious expressions.

Holmes first examined the morning-room. The window was open. A path in the garden lay beneath it.

“Strange,” Holmes murmured.

He studied the small wooden club found at the scene.

“Not a common object,” he said. “Of foreign origin.”

He then examined the carpet and the marks upon it.

“There are footprints,” he observed quietly.

“Footprints?” I asked.

“Yes. Small and uneven. As if made by someone who walked with difficulty.”

Holmes moved to the window and looked out.

“And here,” he said, “are marks in the garden soil.”

He followed them carefully.

“The intruder entered through the window,” he concluded. “And departed the same way.”

“Then Colonel Barclay is innocent?” I asked.

Holmes did not answer immediately.

“We must find the person who made these marks,” he said instead.

Later that afternoon, Holmes gathered information from neighbors. One reported having seen a strange, bent man walking near the house that evening.

“Bent?” I asked.

“Yes,” Holmes said thoughtfully. “A man with a twisted body.”

He questioned further and learned that the man was a street performer who lodged nearby.

“We shall call upon him,” Holmes said.

When we reached the small lodging house, we found a man of unusual appearance. His back was curved sharply, and he walked with a limp. His face, though marked by hardship, showed intelligence.

“You are the man seen near the Barclay house?” Holmes asked calmly.

The man’s eyes flashed.

“Yes,” he said. “And I have reason to be there.”

Holmes’s gaze was steady.

“You knew Mrs. Barclay?”

The crooked man’s face softened.

“I knew her long ago,” he said quietly. “When she was Nancy Devoy.”

I felt a sudden sense of revelation.

“In India?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” the man replied. “Many years ago.”

Holmes folded his arms.

“Tell us everything.”

The man drew a deep breath.

“My name is Henry Wood. I once served in the same regiment as James Barclay.”

His voice grew intense.

“Barclay betrayed me.”

The room grew very still as he began to recount a story of ambition, jealousy, and betrayal in distant India—a story that would explain both the shock of Mrs. Barclay and the strange presence of the crooked man beneath her window.

Part 2

Henry Wood spoke slowly at first, but as memory returned, his voice grew stronger.

“Years ago,” he said, “I was a young soldier in India. I loved Nancy Devoy. She loved me in return. We were to be married.”

His eyes darkened.

“James Barclay also desired her. He was ambitious and proud. When trouble came during a local uprising, I was sent with a message through dangerous ground. I never reached my destination.”

“What happened?” Holmes asked quietly.

“I was betrayed,” Wood replied. “Barclay gave false directions to the enemy. I was captured.”

I felt a deep shock.

“You are certain?” I asked.

Wood nodded grimly.

“Certain. I learned it later from those who held me. Barclay told them where I would pass. He removed a rival without blood on his own hands.”

Holmes listened without interruption.

“I was taken far from the camp,” Wood continued. “I endured years of hardship and torture. My body was broken. I escaped at last, but I was no longer the man I had been.”

He gestured to his twisted back.

“This is what remains of me.”

There was silence for a moment.

“And Mrs. Barclay believed you dead?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” Wood replied. “She was told that I had fallen in the attack. She married Barclay soon after.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“And recently, you returned to England?”

“Yes. I earn my living as a performer. I train a small animal and give shows in the streets.”

I recalled the strange wooden club found in the morning-room.

“The object found near Colonel Barclay—was it yours?” I asked.

Wood reached into his coat and produced a similar stick.

“Yes. It is part of my act. I must have dropped it in the struggle.”

“Then you did enter the house,” Holmes said calmly.

Wood’s expression grew troubled.

“I did not intend harm. I saw Nancy one evening by chance. She recognized me. We spoke. She was horrified when she learned the truth. She insisted on confronting her husband.”

“And on the night of her death?” Holmes prompted.

“I went to the house at her request,” Wood replied. “She wished to speak again. When I approached the window, I heard voices raised in anger. I entered through the open window.”

His voice trembled slightly.

“Barclay saw me. He knew me at once. I saw terror in his eyes.”

“Did you strike him?” I asked.

“No,” Wood answered firmly. “He stepped back, as if he had seen a ghost. He fell and struck his head upon the hearth.”

Holmes nodded.

“And Mrs. Barclay?”

“She turned toward me,” Wood said softly. “She called me by my name. Then she gave a cry and fell. I think the shock was too great for her.”

I felt the sadness of it deeply.

“You did not harm her?” Holmes asked.

“Never,” Wood replied. “I loved her still.”

Holmes paced slowly across the room.

“When the servants forced the door, they found the Colonel unconscious and Mrs. Barclay dead. The door was locked from within.”

“Yes,” Wood said. “I fled through the window before they entered.”

Holmes stopped and faced him.

“Colonel Barclay has no memory of the moment he fell. His injury was caused by striking the hearth, not by a weapon. Mrs. Barclay’s death was due to shock.”

Wood lowered his head.

“Then justice has already been done,” he said quietly. “Barclay lived with his guilt for years.”

Holmes regarded him thoughtfully.

“The law may not pursue you,” he said. “There was no murder. But your presence must be known to clear suspicion.”

Wood nodded slowly.

“I will tell my story if required.”

We returned to Colonel Barclay’s house that evening. Holmes explained the facts to the authorities and to the Colonel himself, who had regained consciousness.

Barclay’s face was pale when he heard Wood’s name.

“I never meant for him to suffer so,” he whispered.

Holmes’s expression remained firm.

“Your ambition led to betrayal. The consequences have followed you.”

Barclay bowed his head.

The charge of murder was withdrawn. Mrs. Barclay’s death was declared the result of shock. Colonel Barclay, though cleared of the crime, was left to face the weight of his past actions.

As we left the house, I turned to Holmes.

“It is a tragic case,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied. “No crime of greed or gain, but one of jealousy and cowardice long ago.”

The image of Henry Wood’s bent figure remained in my mind. His body had

been twisted by suffering, yet his spirit had endured.

"Time does not erase guilt," Holmes said quietly as we walked away. "It merely waits."

Thus ended the affair of the crooked man—a story not of present violence, but of a wrong committed in youth that returned years later to claim its final reckoning.

The Resident Patient

Part 1

One autumn afternoon, when the leaves in Baker Street were moving softly in the wind, Holmes received a visitor whose manner showed deep distress. I was seated near the window with a medical journal when Mrs. Hudson announced a gentleman who urgently requested to see my friend.

The man who entered was middle-aged, pale, and visibly shaken. His clothes were neat but worn, and his eyes moved nervously about the room.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" he asked in a strained voice.

"Yes," Holmes replied calmly. "Pray sit down. You appear troubled."

"My name is Dr. Percy Trevelyan," the man said. "I am a physician. I require your assistance in a matter which threatens both my career and my safety."

Holmes leaned forward slightly.

"Tell us everything."

Dr. Trevelyan drew a deep breath.

"Some years ago, I made a medical discovery which gained modest attention. However, I lacked the means to establish a practice of my own. A man named Mr. Blessington approached me with an unusual proposal."

Holmes's eyes sharpened.

"Go on."

"Blessington offered to finance my medical practice. He provided a house and furnishings. In return, I agreed to share my income and allow him to reside in the house as a patient. He called himself a 'resident patient.' "

“A curious arrangement,” I remarked.

“Yes,” Trevelyan agreed. “At first, all went well. Blessington was nervous and cautious but paid regularly and interfered little in my work.”

Holmes nodded.

“And what has changed?”

“Recently,” Trevelyan continued, “two men visited my practice. The elder claimed to suffer from catalepsy and was accompanied by a younger man who said he was his son.”

Holmes listened carefully.

“They insisted upon a consultation. During the examination, the elder man appeared to fall into a fit. I turned briefly to prepare medicine. When I looked again, the room was empty.”

“They vanished?” I asked.

“Yes,” Trevelyan replied. “They left without explanation.”

Holmes’s expression remained thoughtful.

“And this troubled you?”

“It did. But more troubling was Blessington’s reaction. When I told him of the visit, he became pale with fear. He demanded every detail and insisted that the house be secured.”

“Has Blessington enemies?” Holmes asked.

“He has never spoken of any. Yet his fear was intense.”

Trevelyan wiped his brow.

“The following day, the same two men returned, apologizing for their abrupt departure. Again, the elder man requested examination.”

“And again he fell into a fit?” I asked.

“Yes,” Trevelyan said. “But this time, I did not leave the room. Yet when I briefly stepped outside to call for assistance, they disappeared once more.”

Holmes’s gaze grew sharper.

“They were not patients,” he said quietly.

“I fear not,” Trevelyan agreed. “Last night, I heard a noise in Blessington’s room. When I entered this morning, I found him dead.”

I started.

“Dead?”

“Yes,” Trevelyan whispered. “Hanged.”

Holmes rose at once.

“We must visit your house immediately.”

Within the hour, we were at Dr. Trevelyan’s residence. It was a respectable house in a quiet street. The atmosphere inside felt heavy and tense.

Holmes proceeded directly to Blessington’s room. The body had been taken down, but the marks remained.

“Describe what you found,” Holmes said.

“He was suspended from a hook in the ceiling,” Trevelyan replied. “A cord was tied around his neck.”

Holmes examined the room carefully. He studied the rope, the position of furniture, and the marks upon the carpet.

“This is not suicide,” he said firmly.

“You believe it was murder?” I asked.

Holmes nodded.

“Observe the marks upon the carpet. Three distinct impressions near the bed. More than one visitor stood here.”

“Then the two false patients returned?” Trevelyan said in horror.

“Almost certainly,” Holmes replied.

He moved to the door.

“And this door—was it locked?”

“Yes,” Trevelyan answered. “From the inside.”

Holmes examined the lock and the window.

“The intruders likely entered with a key or through deception. Blessington knew them. He admitted them willingly.”

“But why would he do so if he feared them?” I asked.

Holmes paused.

“Because they held power over him.”

The thought settled heavily in the room.

Holmes then asked for Blessington's personal papers. Among them, he found nothing obvious—only medical notes and financial records.

"There is something in his past," Holmes said quietly. "Something he wished to hide."

"Then the two men were not strangers," I said.

"No," Holmes replied. "They came not for treatment, but for recognition."

He turned to Dr. Trevelyan.

"Tell me everything you know of Blessington before he came to you."

"Very little," Trevelyan admitted. "He claimed to have retired from business and desired quiet."

Holmes folded his arms.

"We must look beyond this house. The truth lies in Blessington's former life."

And thus began our investigation into the strange death of the resident patient—a case that would reveal hidden guilt and long-delayed justice.

Part 2

Holmes remained in Blessington's room for a considerable time, examining every detail with close attention. He measured the distance from the bed to the ceiling hook and studied the rope carefully.

"This cord," he said quietly, "was brought by the visitors. It does not belong to the household."

"You are certain?" I asked.

"Quite. And observe these marks upon the carpet. One man stood near the door, another by the window, and a third by the bed."

"Three men?" Dr. Trevelyan whispered.

Holmes nodded.

"The two who visited as patients, and at least one more. The arrangement suggests not struggle, but judgment."

"Judgment?" I repeated.

Holmes's expression grew grave.

“Blessington was not attacked in haste. He was confronted.”

He then turned to the window.

“There are no signs of forced entry. Therefore, they entered through the door. Blessington admitted them.”

“But he feared them,” Trevelyan insisted.

“Fear does not always prevent action,” Holmes replied. “Sometimes it compels submission.”

Holmes then asked to see the house keys. After examining them, he shook his head.

“No key is missing. They must have been admitted willingly.”

We moved downstairs to the consulting room.

“Tell me again,” Holmes said to Trevelyan, “about the supposed fits.”

“The elder man claimed to suffer from catalepsy,” Trevelyan answered. “During the first visit, he collapsed. I turned away briefly to fetch medicine. When I returned, both were gone.”

Holmes nodded.

“During that moment, they likely explored the house. They wished to confirm that Blessington resided here.”

“And on the second visit?” I asked.

“Again, a fit was feigned,” Holmes continued calmly. “Their purpose was not medical. It was reconnaissance.”

Trevelyan’s face grew pale.

“Then they were planning this.”

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “They wished to observe the house and confirm the identity of their target.”

Holmes then asked for newspapers from previous years. He searched carefully through reports of old criminal cases.

“Blessington is not his true name,” he said suddenly.

“You have discovered something?” I asked.

“Yes. There was once a notorious gang involved in a large robbery. One member turned informer and gave evidence against his companions. The others

were convicted."

Holmes tapped the newspaper.

"The informer disappeared after the trial. It is likely that he changed his name and hid."

Dr. Trevelyan stared at him.

"You believe Blessington was that man?"

"I do," Holmes replied. "His nervous habits, his fear, his desire for isolation—all point to a man who betrayed dangerous companions."

"Then the visitors—" I began.

"Were the men he betrayed," Holmes finished.

Silence filled the room.

"They found him at last," Holmes continued. "They visited under false pretenses to confirm his presence. Then they returned at night to carry out their revenge."

"But why hang him?" I asked.

Holmes's expression was calm but firm.

"Because hanging was the punishment faced by those he betrayed. It was symbolic. They judged him and executed him in their own fashion."

Trevelyan sank into a chair.

"Then there is no doubt—it was murder."

"None," Holmes replied. "The arrangement of the room shows deliberate action. Three men stood over him. The rope was placed carefully. This was not suicide."

"Will they be found?" I asked.

Holmes considered.

"It may prove difficult. They have likely fled. But their identities can be traced through the old case."

Holmes contacted the authorities, and soon the truth was confirmed. Blessington had indeed been a member of a criminal gang years earlier. When arrested, he had given evidence against his accomplices to save himself. After their release from prison, they had sought him out.

"Justice delayed," Holmes said quietly, "but not forgotten."

That evening, as we returned to Baker Street, I reflected upon the tragedy.

“Blessington lived in fear for years,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “Guilt and fear are heavy burdens. He attempted to buy safety through money and concealment. But the past followed him.”

“There is a grim balance in it,” I observed.

Holmes nodded slowly.

“The law punished his companions. They, in turn, punished him. It is not justice in the legal sense, but it is the harsh logic of revenge.”

He looked out into the darkening street.

“This case reminds us that actions have consequences beyond the courtroom. A man may escape under a new name, but he cannot escape the memory of those he wronged.”

Thus ended the affair of the resident patient—a case in which hidden identity and long-held resentment returned to claim their final account.

The Greek Interpreter

Part 1

It was during a quiet evening in Baker Street that Holmes surprised me by speaking of his family. I had long believed that he stood alone in the world, with no close relatives. Therefore, when he mentioned a brother, I listened with keen interest.

“You have a brother?” I asked in surprise.

“Yes,” Holmes replied calmly. “His name is Mycroft.”

“I had never heard you speak of him.”

“He is seven years older than I,” Holmes continued. “His powers of observation and reasoning are, in some respects, greater than my own.”

“Greater?” I repeated.

Holmes nodded slightly.

“Yes. But he lacks energy. He will not trouble himself to pursue matters actively.

He prefers to sit and reason rather than to investigate."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"In London. You shall meet him tonight."

We left our rooms and walked to Pall Mall, where Holmes led me to a quiet club known as the Diogenes Club. It was a place of strict silence, where conversation was discouraged.

"My brother is one of its founders," Holmes explained softly.

Inside, we found Mycroft Holmes seated in a large armchair. He was a man of heavier build than Sherlock, with a broad face and keen eyes. Though he appeared less active, there was a sharp intelligence in his expression.

"Sherlock," he said calmly as we approached. "And this must be Dr. Watson."

I bowed slightly.

"Your brother has told me of your talents," I said.

Mycroft smiled faintly.

"He exaggerates."

The two brothers exchanged a few quiet words. Then Mycroft said,

"Sherlock, I have a case which may interest you. It involves a Greek interpreter and a matter of some urgency."

Holmes's eyes brightened.

"Tell me."

Mycroft nodded toward a nervous-looking man seated nearby.

"Mr. Melas," he said. "He will explain."

The man rose. His manner showed fear and confusion.

"I am a professional interpreter of Greek," he began. "Two nights ago, I was approached by a man who required my services. He said that a Greek gentleman needed assistance."

"Where were you taken?" Holmes asked.

"I was placed in a carriage with the windows covered," Melas replied. "I could not see where we went. After some time, I was brought into a large house. There I saw a man seated in a chair."

"Describe him," Holmes said quietly.

“He was thin and weak. His face was pale. His mouth was bound with plaster, so that he could not speak freely.”

I felt a chill.

“He was a prisoner?” I asked.

“Yes,” Melas answered. “Two Englishmen stood nearby. They forced him to answer questions through me. They demanded that he sign certain papers.”

“What did the papers concern?” Holmes asked.

“They wished him to sign over property to a woman named Sophia.”

Holmes’s expression sharpened.

“And did he comply?”

“No,” Melas replied. “He refused repeatedly. I was instructed to translate only the Englishmen’s questions. But I secretly added questions of my own.”

Holmes gave a slight nod of approval.

“And what did you learn?”

“I learned that his name was Paul Kratides,” Melas said. “He had recently come from Greece. The woman Sophia was his sister. She was in the house but not permitted to see him.”

“Was she present during the interrogation?” I asked.

“At one moment, yes,” Melas said. “She entered the room and recognized her brother. She cried out in distress. But she was quickly removed.”

Holmes leaned forward.

“Then what occurred?”

“The men grew suspicious,” Melas continued. “They threatened me and warned that I must not speak of what I had seen. I was returned to London in the same manner, blind to the location.”

Mycroft spoke quietly.

“Mr. Melas received a second message today, summoning him again.”

Holmes rose at once.

“This cannot be ignored,” he said firmly. “A man is held against his will and forced to sign away his rights. We must act quickly.”

“But we do not know the location,” I said.

Holmes turned to Melas.

“Did you observe any sounds? Any smells? Anything distinctive?”

Melas thought carefully.

“I recall the sound of a train passing at some distance. And I smelled damp earth, as if near open ground.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“That may narrow the field.”

Mycroft added,

“I have made inquiries and found a house recently rented by two Englishmen in a suburb outside London. It matches the description.”

Holmes’s eyes shone with urgency.

“Then we must go there at once.”

Without delay, we arranged to meet the police and travel to the suspected house. The fate of Paul Kratides and his sister hung in the balance.

And thus began the strange and troubling affair of the Greek interpreter—a case of secrecy, cruelty, and desperate confinement.

Part 2

That same evening we set out with Inspector Gregson and several officers toward the house which Mycroft had identified. It stood in a quiet suburb, surrounded by open ground. The night air was cool, and the road was silent.

“Time is important,” Holmes said quietly as we approached. “If they suspect that the interpreter has spoken, they may act quickly.”

The house appeared dark from the outside. No light showed at the windows. Holmes examined the gate and path carefully.

“No sign of movement,” he murmured. “Yet that proves nothing.”

Inspector Gregson knocked firmly at the door. There was no reply. He knocked again, louder.

Still no answer.

“We cannot delay,” Holmes said. “Force it.”

The officers broke the door open, and we entered the hallway. The air inside felt heavy and close. A faint smell reached us—something unpleasant and sharp.

“Gas,” Holmes said sharply. “Quickly!”

We rushed toward the back of the house. From beneath one door a thin line of smoke-like vapor escaped. Holmes seized the handle and threw the door open.

The room was filled with gas. Two figures lay upon the floor. One was Paul Kratides. The other was Mr. Melas.

“Open the windows!” I cried.

We flung them wide. The fresh air poured in. I knelt beside Melas and examined him quickly.

“He lives,” I said. “But barely.”

Holmes turned to Kratides. The Greek man was pale and motionless.

“Is he—?” Holmes asked quietly.

I shook my head after a brief examination.

“He is dead.”

Holmes’s face grew grave.

“They have attempted to kill them both,” he said.

We carried Melas into the fresh air and revived him slowly. He opened his eyes weakly and looked about in confusion.

“The men,” he whispered. “They said I had betrayed them.”

“They have fled,” Inspector Gregson said grimly.

Holmes moved swiftly through the house, examining rooms for signs of departure. It was clear that the criminals had left in haste.

“They learned that we were coming,” Holmes said. “Perhaps from some careless word. They attempted to silence the interpreter and the prisoner before escaping.”

In another room we found evidence of recent occupation. Papers were scattered, and a trunk lay open. The woman Sophia Kratides was not present.

“Where is she?” I asked.

Holmes’s expression darkened.

“Likely taken away with them.”

The officers searched the grounds, but no trace of the criminals remained. They had fled before our arrival.

As Melas regained strength, he told us what had occurred after his second visit.

“They forced Paul again to sign the papers,” he said weakly. “He refused. They grew angry. When they realized that I had spoken with him privately, they bound us both and turned on the gas.”

Holmes listened in silence.

“Their plan was to make it appear as suicide,” he said at last. “Two men overcome by gas.”

I looked toward the body of Paul Kratides.

“He was brave,” I said softly. “He refused to surrender his property.”

Holmes nodded.

“Yes. His courage cost him his life.”

We arranged for Melas to be taken to safety. The body of Paul Kratides was removed with solemn care.

As we left the house, the night seemed colder than before.

“Will they be caught?” I asked Holmes quietly.

“It is possible,” he replied. “Their identities are known. Their actions will follow them. But they are cunning men.”

“And Sophia?” I asked.

Holmes paused.

“If she still lives, we must hope that she escapes their control.”

In the days that followed, news arrived that the criminals had fled abroad. Some months later, word came that they had been found dead in a distant land, victims of violence.

Sophia Kratides was rescued and returned safely to her country.

“A tragic case,” I said to Holmes when all was concluded.

“Yes,” he replied. “Cruelty masked as greed. The imprisonment of a helpless man. It is a reminder that reason must act swiftly when freedom is threatened.”

I reflected upon the narrow margin by which Melas had survived and the courage of Paul Kratides in the face of intimidation.

“Without your brother’s assistance,” I said, “the matter might have ended differently.”

Holmes allowed himself a faint smile.

“Mycroft’s mind is formidable. When he chooses to act, the result is effective.”

Thus ended the affair of the Greek interpreter—a case of hidden confinement and ruthless ambition, in which delay cost one life but swift action saved another.

The Naval Treaty

Part 1

It was in the summer of a certain year that Holmes received one of the most delicate cases ever entrusted to him. The matter concerned not merely private interests, but the honor of the nation itself.

One morning, as we sat at breakfast in Baker Street, a letter arrived marked urgent. Holmes opened it and read with growing attention.

“This is from a former schoolmate of mine,” he said. “His name is Percy Phelps. He now holds a position at the Foreign Office.”

“That sounds important,” I remarked.

“It is indeed,” Holmes replied gravely. “He writes that he is in great distress and begs for my immediate assistance.”

Before Holmes could say more, a cab drew up outside, and a young woman was shown into our sitting-room. She was pale and clearly anxious.

“I am Miss Annie Harrison,” she said. “I come on behalf of Mr. Percy Phelps. He is very ill and cannot travel. He implores Mr. Holmes to visit him at once.”

Holmes rose immediately.

“What has occurred?” he asked.

The young woman hesitated.

“A document of extreme importance has been stolen from him.”

Holmes’s expression sharpened.

“What document?”

“A naval treaty between England and a foreign power.”

I felt a sudden shock.

“Stolen?” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” she replied. “Mr. Phelps was entrusted with copying it. During a brief absence from his desk, it disappeared.”

Holmes did not waste a moment.

“We leave for Woking at once,” he said.

That afternoon we reached the house where Percy Phelps lay ill. He was pale and thin, clearly weakened by both sickness and anxiety.

“Holmes,” he whispered as we entered, “you must save me.”

Holmes sat beside him calmly.

“Tell me everything from the beginning.”

Phelps drew a shaky breath.

“Some weeks ago, my uncle, who holds a high position in the Foreign Office, entrusted me with copying a secret treaty. It concerned naval arrangements of great importance.”

Holmes nodded.

“You were alone?”

“Yes,” Phelps said. “I worked late into the evening. After several hours, I felt the need for refreshment. I rang for coffee.”

“Who responded?” Holmes asked.

“A commissionaire downstairs received the order,” Phelps replied. “He sent his wife to deliver it.”

“And you left the room?” I asked.

“For only a few minutes,” Phelps said. “The coffee did not arrive, so I went downstairs to inquire. I was absent no more than ten minutes.”

“And when you returned?” Holmes prompted.

“The document was gone.”

The room fell silent.

“There were no signs of forced entry?” Holmes asked.

“None. The doors and windows were secure. The commissionaire claimed he

had seen no one enter or leave."

Holmes folded his hands.

"Who knew you were working late?"

"Very few," Phelps answered. "Only my uncle and a colleague."

"Was any part of the treaty left behind?" I asked.

"No. It was entirely gone."

Holmes considered this carefully.

"And what followed?"

"The alarm was raised immediately," Phelps said weakly. "Police were called. The building was searched. Nothing was found."

"And since then?" Holmes asked.

"I fell ill from shock. My reputation is ruined unless the treaty is recovered."

Holmes's voice remained steady.

"Have you received any threats or messages?"

"None," Phelps replied.

Holmes rose slowly and paced the room.

"The theft was precise," he said. "Only the treaty was taken. No other papers disturbed."

"Which suggests knowledge," I said.

"Exactly," Holmes replied. "The thief knew what to seek."

He turned back to Phelps.

"You must rest. I shall examine the scene and pursue the matter."

As we left the house, Miss Harrison walked beside us.

"Do you believe the treaty can be recovered?" she asked anxiously.

Holmes's expression was thoughtful but firm.

"Where there is no clear escape route, there is often concealment. We shall see."

The honor of a young man—and perhaps of the country itself—rested upon the outcome.

Thus began the investigation of the naval treaty, a case in which secrecy, opportunity, and careful timing would play decisive roles.

Part 2

Holmes insisted upon visiting the Foreign Office at once. Though Percy Phelps was too weak to accompany us, he provided exact details of the room and the events of that evening.

The office stood solid and quiet, its halls echoing faintly as we walked. Holmes examined the room where the treaty had vanished. The desk was placed near the center, with a window overlooking the street. The door opened into a corridor that led toward the commissionaire's station.

"You see," Holmes said quietly, "the theft must have occurred during the brief interval when Phelps left the room."

"But the building was secure," I replied. "No stranger could enter unnoticed."

Holmes nodded slowly.

"Which leaves only those already within."

He examined the window carefully.

"It opens onto a busy street. Yet any attempt to escape through it would have drawn attention."

He then walked to the door and studied the lock.

"No sign of tampering," he murmured.

"Then the thief walked out openly," I said.

"Precisely," Holmes replied. "The treaty was likely concealed upon the person and removed without haste."

We then spoke with the commissionaire. He was a middle-aged man with a tired expression.

"I never left my post," he insisted. "No one passed who should not have."

"And your wife?" Holmes asked.

"She brought the coffee upstairs," he said.

"Did she enter the room?" Holmes inquired.

"No. When she reached the door, Mr. Phelps was absent. She placed the tray down and returned."

Holmes's eyes sharpened.

“Did she see anyone in the corridor?”

“No.”

Holmes questioned her as well, but her answers were consistent. She claimed to have seen nothing unusual.

As we left the building, I turned to Holmes.

“There appears no clear suspect,” I said.

“On the contrary,” Holmes replied thoughtfully. “There is one fact that troubles me deeply.”

“Which is?”

“The alarm.”

“The alarm?” I repeated.

“Yes,” Holmes said. “The commissionaire’s wife claimed to have been startled by the ringing of the bell from upstairs. Yet Phelps stated that he rang only once for coffee. Why would the bell ring again?”

I considered this.

“Someone else may have rung it,” I suggested.

Holmes nodded slowly.

“Exactly. If the thief had been interrupted, he may have rung the bell deliberately to create confusion.”

We returned to Woking that evening. Holmes sat long in thought beside the fire.

“There is another possibility,” he said quietly.

“That the treaty was never removed from the building?” I asked.

“Or never removed from the house,” he replied.

“The house?” I repeated in surprise.

“Yes,” Holmes said calmly. “Consider: if the thief feared immediate search, he might conceal the document temporarily and retrieve it later.”

“But where?”

Holmes looked toward the door.

“Among those who had access.”

The next morning, Holmes remained at Percy Phelps’s house. He appeared to abandon the case, which puzzled both Phelps and Miss Harrison.

“You are resting?” I asked quietly.

“Observing,” Holmes replied.

That night, as we sat in darkness in the garden, Holmes watched the windows of the house closely.

“What do you expect?” I whispered.

“Patience,” he said softly.

Shortly after midnight, a figure approached the side entrance of the house. The man moved cautiously and entered silently.

Holmes sprang to his feet.

“Now!” he said.

We followed swiftly and entered through the same door. The figure was already inside Percy Phelps’s bedroom. Holmes burst in just as the man bent over a small box beneath the bed.

“Hands up!” Holmes commanded.

The intruder froze.

It was none other than Joseph Harrison, Miss Harrison’s brother.

“You!” I exclaimed.

Joseph’s face was pale.

Holmes seized the box and opened it. Inside lay the missing naval treaty.

“You concealed it here from the beginning,” Holmes said calmly. “When you visited Percy that evening, you had opportunity. You observed his distress and sought to profit.”

Joseph Harrison lowered his head.

“I needed money,” he muttered.

Holmes’s voice remained firm.

“You stole the document, concealed it in this house, and waited for the alarm to pass. Tonight, believing suspicion removed, you attempted to recover it.”

The treaty was secured at once.

The following day, Percy Phelps was informed. His relief was overwhelming.

“You have saved my honor,” he said with gratitude.

Holmes inclined his head slightly.

“The theft required access and timing. Only one close to you possessed both.”

As we returned to Baker Street, I reflected upon the case.

“The thief hid in plain sight,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “Often the boldest act is to conceal something where no one thinks to look.”

Thus ended the affair of the naval treaty—a case of secrecy and ambition, in which patience and quiet watchfulness restored both a document and a reputation.

The Final Problem

Part 1

It is with deep reluctance that I write the account of the events which I now describe. For a long time I remained silent, believing that the world had already judged the matter. Yet certain misconceptions have arisen, and I feel it my duty to place the truth on record.

It was in the early spring of that year when Holmes first spoke to me of Professor Moriarty.

“Watson,” he said one evening as we sat in our rooms in Baker Street, “you have never heard of Professor Moriarty.”

“Never,” I replied.

“That is precisely the point,” Holmes said quietly. “He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city.”

I looked at him in astonishment.

“You mean he is a criminal?”

“He is the head of a vast network,” Holmes answered. “A man of remarkable intellect. His brain is as powerful as my own.”

Holmes explained that Moriarty had once been a professor of mathematics, respected and admired. Yet beneath his reputation lay a mind devoted to crime. He did not commit offenses directly. Instead, he planned them, guided them, and remained untouched.

“You have proof?” I asked.

“I have gathered evidence for months,” Holmes replied. “I am close to exposing him. But he is aware of me.”

As if to confirm his words, there came a knock at the door. Mrs. Hudson announced a visitor.

The man who entered was tall and thin, with a high forehead and deep-set eyes. His manner was calm, yet there was something cold and controlled in his presence.

“You are Sherlock Holmes,” he said evenly.

“I am,” Holmes replied without rising.

“I am Professor Moriarty.”

I felt a sudden chill.

The two men regarded one another in silence for a moment.

“You have been interfering in my affairs,” Moriarty said quietly.

“And you in mine,” Holmes returned calmly.

Moriarty’s voice remained steady.

“You must desist. You stand in my path.”

Holmes smiled faintly.

“I shall not.”

The Professor’s eyes grew harder.

“You have little time left,” he said softly.

With that, he turned and left the room.

When the door closed, I looked at Holmes with concern.

“He threatens you,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “He is dangerous, Watson. More dangerous than any man we have faced.”

In the days that followed, Holmes revealed that several attempts had been made upon his life—subtle and clever attempts. A cab had nearly run him down. A brick had fallen from a roof at the moment he passed below.

“These are warnings,” Holmes said. “He knows that I am close.”

“Then what will you do?” I asked.

“Leave England for a time,” Holmes replied calmly. “I have arranged matters

so that the police will move against his organization soon. But until then, I must remove myself from his reach."

I insisted upon accompanying him.

"You are my friend," I said firmly. "Where you go, I go."

Holmes hesitated only briefly.

"Very well, Watson. We shall travel together."

We left London quietly and journeyed across the Channel to the continent. Our movements were cautious and varied, for Holmes believed that Moriarty would pursue us.

In Switzerland, among the mountains and clear air, Holmes appeared more at ease, though I knew that his mind remained alert.

One day we reached the village of Meiringen and prepared to visit the Reichenbach Falls, a mighty cascade that plunged into a deep chasm below.

The roar of the water was tremendous. Mist rose from the depths, and the narrow path wound close to the edge.

As we stood near the falls, a messenger arrived with a letter addressed to me. It claimed that a woman at the hotel required medical assistance.

"You must go, Watson," Holmes said calmly. "I shall remain here and await your return."

Though reluctant, I obeyed.

When I reached the hotel, I learned that no such woman existed. I hurried back along the path toward the falls, my heart heavy with fear.

As I approached the spot where we had stood, I saw no sign of Holmes. Only his walking-stick lay upon the ground.

I rushed forward and found near the edge of the precipice signs of struggle. The earth was torn, and footprints led to the brink.

A small note lay pinned beneath a stone. It was in Holmes's handwriting.

"My dear Watson," it read, "I fear that Professor Moriarty has forced me to choose this path. He arrived after you departed. We shall meet here in combat. If I do not survive, know that I hold you in the highest esteem."

The letter ended simply.

I stepped to the edge and looked down. Far below, the waters of the Reichenbach roared and churned. No human form was visible.

It was clear that Holmes and Moriarty had grappled and fallen together into the abyss.

Thus ended the life of Sherlock Holmes, my friend, in pursuit of the most formidable adversary he had ever known.

And I, left upon that lonely path above the roaring falls, felt that not only had I lost a companion, but the world had lost a mind the like of which it would never see again.

Part 2

For some minutes I stood motionless upon that narrow path above the roaring abyss. The mist from the falls rose around me, cold upon my face, and the thunder of the water seemed to fill my ears and drive all clear thought from my mind. I called Holmes's name once, though I knew it was useless. The sound was swallowed at once by the vast rush of the torrent below.

I forced myself to examine the ground more carefully. The soft earth near the edge bore the marks of two men's feet. They faced one another. There were deep indentations where heels had pressed hard, as though each man had strained for balance. Beyond that point, the prints ended abruptly.

There was no sign of return.

I lay flat and peered over the edge, though it made my head swim to do so. The drop was sheer. The river hurled itself into a dark chasm, and the spray rose in thick clouds. No man could fall there and live.

Holmes's note lay in my hand. The writing was steady and calm, without tremor. Even in the face of death, he had thought of me.

I returned slowly to the hotel, my mind numb. I informed the authorities at once. A search was made along the banks below, but no trace of either body was discovered. It was believed that the current had carried them away.

I remained in Switzerland for some days, hoping against hope for some sign.

None came.

At last I returned to England, bearing the dreadful news.

The police moved swiftly upon the criminal organization which Holmes had long investigated. With Moriarty gone, much of it collapsed. Several arrests were made. The network which had spread its influence across the city was broken.

Yet for me, the victory brought little comfort.

The rooms at Baker Street felt empty beyond measure. His violin lay silent. His chair stood where he had left it. The very air seemed changed.

I found among his papers evidence of the months of labor he had devoted to bringing down Moriarty. There were careful notes, dates, and names. He had been thorough to the end.

Friends and clients wrote with disbelief when they learned of his death. Many had depended upon his skill. Some refused to accept that he was gone.

I could not blame them.

For years afterward, whenever I passed some narrow alley or saw some curious case reported in the papers, I would think instinctively, “Holmes would have solved it.”

In quiet moments I would recall his voice, calm and precise, explaining some chain of reasoning. I would remember the sharp light in his eyes when a mystery began to unfold.

The image that remained strongest, however, was that of the lonely path beside the Reichenbach Falls—the torn earth, the abandoned stick, the roaring water below.

Professor Moriarty had indeed been a worthy adversary. Two minds of rare power had met there. Neither had yielded.

I have written this account not only to honor my friend but to correct false reports which have appeared from time to time. There was no accident. There was no misstep. It was a deliberate encounter between two determined men.

Holmes knew the risk. He chose to face it so that others might be free from the reach of a hidden and powerful criminal.

If he fell, he fell in the performance of duty.

And though the world believes him dead, his memory remains vivid to me. In intellect, in courage, and in devotion to justice, he stood alone.

Thus ended, as I then believed, the career of Sherlock Holmes—at the edge of a great abyss, beneath the thunder of falling water, having removed from society one of its darkest influences.

I close this record with sorrow, yet also with pride, for I was privileged to call him friend.