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

The Adventure of the Empty House

Part 1

It was in the spring of 1894 when all London spoke about a strange death. The rich and well-known people of the city were shocked. A young man named Ronald Adair had been killed in a way that no one could explain. At that time the police told the public only part of the facts. Now, many years later, I can tell the full story. The crime itself was strange, but what followed it changed my life in a way I can still feel when I think of it. Even now my heart beats faster when I remember the great surprise and deep joy that came to me on that day.

After the death of my dear friend Sherlock Holmes, I always read the news about crime with great care. I even tried, once or twice, to solve small problems by using his methods, though I did not do well. Still, no case touched me like the death of Ronald Adair. As I read about the inquest, which ended with a decision that he had been murdered by some unknown person, I felt again how much the world had lost when Holmes died. There were many strange points in this case. I was sure that Holmes would have seen something that others did not.

Ronald Adair was the second son of the Earl of Maynooth. His father was governor of a colony in Australia, but his mother and sister were living in London at 427 Park Lane. Ronald was young, polite, and moved in high society. He had

no known enemies. He had once been engaged to a young woman, but the engagement had ended in a calm way. He had quiet habits and showed little strong feeling. No one could have guessed that such a man would die in a violent way.

Ronald liked to play cards. He belonged to several clubs and often played whist. On the day he died, he had played in the afternoon and again in the evening. The men who played with him said that he did not lose much money. In fact, some weeks before, he and Colonel Moran had won a large sum from two other men. So money did not seem to be a reason for murder. He returned home at ten that night. His mother and sister were out. A servant heard him go into his sitting-room on the second floor. Later, when his mother came home and tried to say good night, she found the door locked from the inside. No one answered. When the door was forced open, Ronald was found dead. His head had been badly injured by a bullet. Yet no gun was found in the room.

Money lay on the table in neat little piles. There were notes and coins. There was also a sheet of paper with numbers and names, as if he had been adding up his gains and losses at cards. The window had been open earlier because of smoke from the fire. But below the window were flowers and soft earth, and there were no marks of any person climbing in or out. No one in the busy street had heard a shot. It seemed impossible that someone had fired from outside, yet no weapon was in the room. The case became known as the Park Lane Mystery, and no one could explain it.

I spent the whole day thinking about these facts. I tried to find one simple line that could join them all. In the evening I walked across the park and found myself near the house. A small crowd stood outside, looking up at the window. Among them was a tall thin man with colored glasses, who seemed to be explaining his ideas to others. I did not agree with what I heard and moved away. As I turned, I bumped into an old man with a bent back who was carrying many books. Several fell to the ground. I picked them up and noticed that one was about tree worship. The old man looked angry and took his books quickly, as if they were very dear to him. He walked away into the crowd.

I looked again at the house. It stood behind a low wall. It would have been easy

for someone to enter the garden, but the window was too high for a man to climb without leaving signs. More confused than before, I returned home to Kensington. I had been in my study only a few minutes when my maid told me that a visitor wished to see me. To my surprise it was the same old book collector. His sharp face looked out from white hair, and he held many books under his arm.

He spoke in a strange rough voice and said that he wished to apologize for his rude manner earlier. He said he had seen me enter my house and had followed me. He told me that he kept a small bookshop nearby and hoped I might visit it. He spoke about filling a space on my shelf. I turned my head for a moment to look at the place he pointed to. When I turned back, Sherlock Holmes stood before me, smiling.

I rose and stared. For some seconds I could not speak. A gray mist passed before my eyes, and I believe I fainted. When I opened them, I felt brandy on my lips. Holmes stood over me with a small flask in his hand. His voice, which I knew so well, spoke gently to me and asked me to forgive him for the shock.

I caught his arms and cried his name. I asked if it was truly he. I asked if he had really escaped from the terrible fall at the waterfall. He told me to calm myself and asked if I felt strong enough to talk. I could not take my eyes from him. He looked thinner and paler than before, but he was alive. I touched his sleeve to be sure he was not a spirit. Joy filled me so deeply that I could hardly speak.

He sat across from me and lit a cigarette in his old quiet way. The white hair and books lay on the table. He said that he had never fallen into the deep water. His note to me had been real, but he had escaped. Professor Moriarty had rushed at him. They had struggled on the edge. Holmes had used a form of wrestling he had learned and had broken free. Moriarty had fallen alone into the water below.

I told him that I had seen the tracks that led down the path and none that came back. He explained that he had climbed up the rock wall behind him and hidden on a narrow ledge. He said that he could not risk walking back along the path because others wanted him dead. If the world believed him dead, those enemies would grow careless. So he had let the world think he was gone. He had traveled far away for safety.

As he spoke, I listened in wonder. I felt again that I sat beside the most remarkable man in Europe. Yet he ended his story for the moment and said that we had work to do that night. He told me that he had returned because of the strange death of Ronald Adair. There was one dangerous man still in London. That man, he said, believed Holmes was dead. But Holmes had come back to hunt him.

Part 2

I could hardly sit still as he spoke. My mind was full of questions, yet I saw from his face that he would not answer them at once. He rose and walked across the room with long, light steps. Though he looked thin and pale, there was fire in his eyes. He told me that there was still one man left from the old circle of Professor Moriarty. This man was bold, clever, and full of hate. Holmes believed that this man had killed Ronald Adair.

“You will come with me to-night?” he asked.

I answered that I would go anywhere with him. The old days seemed to return in a moment. He smiled slightly and said that we would have a light meal before we left. While we ate, he gave me a short account of his years away. He had traveled through many lands under other names. He had been in the mountains of Tibet and in the hot lands of the East. He had worked in a small room in the south of France on a study of certain chemical matters. All the time he had watched and waited for news of the last and most dangerous of his enemies.

When he read of the death of Ronald Adair, he knew at once that his time had come. He believed that only one man in London had the skill and nerve to fire such a shot without sound and without being seen. That man was Colonel Sebastian Moran. Holmes told me that Moran had once been a brave officer in India and a famous hunter of wild animals. Yet he had turned to crime. He had been the right hand of Moriarty. He had even followed Holmes to the mountains in Switzerland and had tried to kill him there after Moriarty fell.

“If I returned openly,” said Holmes, “he would act at once. I knew that he must be watching Baker Street. So I chose to appear there in such a way that he would

see me. I wished him to believe that I sat in my old chair.”

It was then that he told me of the plan. He had asked a skilled man in France to make a wax figure of his head and shoulders. That afternoon he had placed it in the window of our old rooms at Baker Street. Mrs. Hudson had helped him. From the street it looked as if Holmes himself sat there in the light.

At half past nine we left my house. I carried my revolver in my pocket, as in former days. We rode in a cab, and I noticed that Holmes watched every street corner. He looked behind us more than once. His face was quiet but firm. I felt that danger was near, though the streets were calm.

We did not stop at Baker Street. Instead, Holmes told the driver to stop near Cavendish Square. From there we walked through many narrow streets and small yards. I had never known that so many dark passages lay behind the great houses of London. At last we came to the back door of an empty house. Holmes opened it with a key.

Inside it was dark and cold. The air smelled of dust and old wood. Our steps made light sounds on the bare floor. Holmes led me to a large room at the front. From there we could see, through a dusty window, the lighted window of our own rooms across the street. The blind was down, and behind it I saw the clear black shape of a man seated in a chair. It was Holmes, or so it seemed.

I felt a strong shock. For a moment I thought that Holmes stood both beside me and in the window. He gave a soft laugh and whispered that it was only the wax figure. Mrs. Hudson would move it from time to time so that anyone watching would believe it alive.

We waited in silence. The night was cold, and the wind moved along the street. A few people passed by, most with coats pulled close. I saw two men stand in a doorway not far away. I wished to point them out, but Holmes raised a hand to stop me. His eyes were fixed on the street.

Time passed slowly. At last the street grew quiet. Fewer people walked there. The light still burned in our window. The shadow of the seated figure was clear. Then suddenly I saw that the shadow had turned. It now showed the back of the head. I whispered in surprise, but Holmes said softly that Mrs. Hudson had

changed its position, as planned.

He seemed restless now. He moved his feet and tapped lightly on the wall. I felt that something was about to happen. Then I heard a sound behind us, not from the street but from inside the house. It was a soft step on the floor below. A door closed very gently.

Holmes caught my arm and pulled me into the darkest corner of the room. I placed my hand on my revolver. The steps came closer, slow and careful. A tall dark shape appeared at the door. The man stood still for a moment, then crept into the room. He did not see us.

He went to the window and raised it a little. The light from the street fell on his face. I saw that he was an older man with a long gray mustache and a high bald head. His eyes shone with strong feeling. He laid down a long object that had made a soft metal sound on the floor. Then he took out another heavy piece and worked with it. There was a click, then a slow turning sound, then another click.

When he rose, I saw that he held a strange gun. It was not like a common gun. It was longer and thinner. He opened it, put something inside, and closed it again. Then he knelt and placed the end of the gun on the window ledge. He looked through the sight and aimed across the street at the lighted window of Baker Street.

I followed the line of his aim and saw the black shape of Holmes's head in the blind. The man breathed out slowly, like a hunter ready to fire. For a second all was still. Then there came a sharp sound, not loud like a normal gun, but more like a strong hiss. At the same time I heard the crash of broken glass from across the street.

In that instant Holmes leaped forward. He threw himself on the man's back and pushed him to the floor. The man turned with great force and seized Holmes by the throat. I struck him hard on the head with the butt of my revolver. He fell, and together we held him down.

Holmes gave a loud whistle. At once we heard fast steps outside. Two policemen and a plain-clothes officer ran into the room. It was Inspector Lestrade.

"That you, Mr. Holmes?" he said.

"Yes," said Holmes calmly. "I think you have come at the right time."

The man on the floor struggled, but the policemen held him. I could see his face clearly now. It was strong and cruel. His blue eyes were full of hate as he looked at Holmes.

“You clever devil!” he muttered again and again.

Holmes stood over him and straightened his coat. “Colonel Sebastian Moran,” he said quietly. “I am glad to see you again.”

The colonel stared as if he saw a ghost. He could hardly speak. Lestrade placed handcuffs on him. Holmes picked up the strange gun and showed it to the inspector.

“This is a powerful air-gun,” he said. “It makes little sound. It can fire a soft bullet with great force. It was made for Professor Moriarty. With this gun Colonel Moran shot Ronald Adair through the open window of Park Lane.”

Lestrade looked surprised. “That is a strong charge,” he said.

“It is the true one,” answered Holmes. “And you have now the man who did it.”

Part 3

The colonel stood between the two policemen, breathing hard but silent now. The wild light in his eyes had not gone. He looked at Holmes as if he would spring at him again if he had the chance. Holmes, however, appeared calm and almost amused. He turned the strange air-gun over in his hands, studying it with deep interest, as though it were a rare object in a museum and not a weapon that had almost killed him.

“A fine piece of work,” he said softly. “Very strong, yet almost without sound. Only a man of great skill could use it as you have done, Colonel.”

Moran said nothing, but his lips moved as if he were speaking to himself. Lestrade cleared his throat and asked what charge he should write down. Holmes replied that the true charge was the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair. He then gave, in a few clear sentences, the heart of his reasoning.

“Colonel Moran was a partner of young Adair at cards,” he said. “He had the skill of a hunter and the nerve of a man who has faced death many times. But he

also had a weakness. He played unfairly. I have known this for years. I believe that Adair discovered his dishonesty. The young man was adding up his accounts that night, perhaps trying to see how much money should be returned. He may have warned the colonel that he would no longer play with him. That would mean ruin for a man who lived by his card gains. So Moran followed him home and shot him through the open window with this air-gun. No one heard the shot. No gun was found in the room. The door was locked from the inside because Adair had locked it himself before he began his calculations.”

Lestrade listened carefully. He nodded slowly. “It fits,” he said at last. “It fits well enough.”

Moran gave a low sound that might have been a laugh. “You cannot prove it,” he said in a hoarse voice. “You have nothing.”

Holmes smiled. “We have the weapon. We have the bullet taken from my wax head. We shall also find, I think, that the bullet taken from Mr. Adair matches it closely. Your skill betrayed you. Only one man in London could have made that shot.”

At this the colonel’s face changed. For a moment the proud look fell away, and I saw fear beneath it. Then the policemen led him out of the house. Lestrade followed, promising to send for the air-gun. Soon we were alone in the dark room.

Holmes closed the window and pulled down the blind. “Come, Watson,” he said. “Let us return to Baker Street. I think we have earned a quiet hour.”

We crossed the street together. The broken glass still lay on the floor of our sitting-room. Mrs. Hudson met us, pale but smiling. The wax figure stood on its small table. A hole had passed clean through its head. The bullet had flattened itself against the wall.

Holmes took it from Mrs. Hudson and handed it to me. “A soft bullet,” he said. “Fired from an air-gun. It would have passed through my brain as easily as it passed through this wax.”

I looked at the shattered model and felt a chill. If Holmes had truly been sitting there, the night would have ended very differently. He saw the thought in my face.

“Chance favors the prepared mind,” he said lightly. “I knew that if I showed

myself at the window, our hunter would act. The empty house gave him a place from which to shoot. He believed himself hidden. He did not think that he was the one being watched.”

We sat down in the old chairs, as in former days. The room seemed the same as before, yet to me it felt new. The long absence had made everything dearer. Holmes lit a cigar and leaned back, his thin face thoughtful.

“I could not return to London,” he said, “while Colonel Moran was free. He followed me once to the mountains and tried to kill me there. He would have tried again here. So long as he was at liberty, my life was not safe. But the murder of Adair gave me the opening I needed.”

He then spoke more fully about Moran. The colonel had been born into a good family and had served bravely in India. He had written books about hunting wild animals in the mountains. He had shown courage beyond doubt. Yet something had turned within him. Holmes spoke of a theory that a man sometimes carries in himself the long history of his family, and that at some point a dark side may rise to the surface.

“Whatever the cause,” he said, “Moran became the chief helper of Moriarty. When the great professor fell, the colonel remained. He was the second most dangerous man in London.”

I remembered the small note written in Holmes’s book of names: “The second most dangerous man in London.” It seemed almost simple when Holmes explained it, yet no one else had seen the truth.

“And now?” I asked.

“Now,” he answered, “we must wait for the trial. The evidence will speak. But whatever comes, Moran will trouble us no more. The famous air-gun will rest in a glass case, and I may once again turn my mind to the small puzzles of our city.”

He rose and walked to the window. The night was quiet now. The wind had dropped. London lay calm beneath the dark sky. For a long moment he stood without speaking. Then he turned back to me, and there was warmth in his expression.

“My dear Watson,” he said, “I regret the pain that my silence caused you during

these years. It was necessary. I could not trust even your honest face to hide the truth. But I am glad beyond words to sit here once more, with you in that chair.”

I felt my throat tighten. “You should never doubt my loyalty,” I said, though I understood his reason.

“I never doubted it,” he replied gently. “It was because I knew your loyalty that I feared for you. If my enemies had learned that you knew I was alive, you would have been in danger.”

We spoke long into the night. He told me more of his travels, of strange lands and strange faces. Yet even as he spoke, I saw that his mind had already returned to London and to the work that lay ahead. The quiet joy that had filled me when he first stood in my study returned again. The world seemed right once more.

Thus ended the adventure of the empty house. The Park Lane Mystery was solved. The last shadow of Moriarty’s band was removed. And Sherlock Holmes, whom the world had believed dead, walked again in the streets of London, ready to meet whatever strange and difficult case might next call for his keen mind and steady hand.

The Adventure of the Norwood Builder

Part 1

It was some months after my friend had returned to London that he made a remark one morning which showed both his pride and his strange sense of loss. We were sitting at breakfast in Baker Street. Holmes had been back in his old rooms for a short time, and I had sold my small medical practice in order to join him again. As he leaned back in his chair and folded his newspaper, he said that, from the point of view of a student of crime, London had become dull since the death of Professor Moriarty.

I told him that most honest people would not share that view. Holmes smiled faintly and admitted that the city was safer now. Yet he could not hide the fact that he missed the challenge which the great criminal had offered. He spoke of the past

days when even a small note in the morning paper could suggest the hand of a master mind. Petty thefts and strange acts of violence had once seemed to him parts of one large design. Now, he said with a light shrug of his shoulders, such deep patterns were gone.

Though he spoke in this way, our life together had not been without danger. In the weeks after his return we had already faced one or two serious matters. Yet Holmes disliked praise, and he asked me to keep silent about them. I agreed, as I always had, to respect his wishes. It was on one of those quiet mornings that our peace was broken in a most sudden fashion.

A loud ring sounded at the doorbell, followed at once by heavy blows upon the door itself. We heard fast steps on the stairs, and then the door of our sitting-room flew open. A young man rushed in without waiting to be announced. His hair was pale, his face white, and his eyes wild with fear. He looked from Holmes to me as if he feared that even we might turn against him.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Holmes,” he cried in a shaking voice. “You must forgive me. I am almost out of my mind. My name is John Hector McFarlane.”

He spoke his name as if it should mean something to us. Holmes looked at him with calm interest but gave no sign of recognition. The young man stood trembling, his chest rising and falling quickly. Holmes pushed his cigarette case toward him and invited him to sit down.

“You appear greatly disturbed,” Holmes said gently. “Pray take a seat and tell us quietly what troubles you. Beyond the fact that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, and somewhat short of breath, I know nothing about you.”

The young man stared in surprise. I saw at once how Holmes had reached these small conclusions. The bundle of legal papers in his pocket, the charm of a society on his watch-chain, and the slight wheeze in his breathing had told the tale. But to our visitor it seemed almost magic.

“Yes, I am a solicitor,” he said. “And I am also the most unfortunate man in London. Mr. Holmes, do not let them take me before I have told you everything. I could go to prison more calmly if I knew that you believed in me.”

“Prison?” Holmes repeated, raising his brows. “On what charge do you expect

such treatment?"

"On the charge of murdering Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood."

I saw at once that this announcement gave Holmes more interest than surprise. He leaned forward slightly in his chair, his eyes bright. The young man seized a newspaper that lay near at hand and opened it with shaking fingers.

"It is all here," he said. "You must have seen it. My name will soon be known everywhere."

Holmes handed the paper to me and asked me to read aloud the account in question. I found the article at once. It spoke of a strange event in Lower Norwood. Mr. Jonas Oldacre, a builder who had once carried on a large business, had disappeared from his home. Late in the night a stack of wood behind his house had been found on fire. When the flames were at last put out, it was discovered that Mr. Oldacre could not be found.

The article described his house, Deep Dene House, and mentioned that he was a bachelor of fifty-two years of age. It was said that his room showed signs of a struggle. There were small marks of blood and an oak walking-stick stained at the handle. The stick had been identified as belonging to a young solicitor named John Hector McFarlane. It was further stated that the police believed they had a clear motive and that an arrest might soon follow.

As I finished reading, I looked at the young man before us. He was very pale now, and his hands were clasped tightly together. His dress was neat but slightly disordered, as if he had dressed in haste. His fair hair fell over a forehead damp with sweat.

"You see," he said in a low voice. "They are already hunting me. I was followed from the station this morning. My poor mother will not survive the shock if I am taken as a murderer."

Holmes regarded him steadily. "One question first," he said. "Why are you still at liberty if the evidence is so strong?"

"I did not know of the charge until I was on the train," McFarlane answered. "Last night I stayed at an hotel in Norwood. I had been there on business with Mr. Oldacre. When I read the paper this morning, I saw at once the danger. I hurried

here before going to my office or home.”

At that very moment the bell rang again, sharp and firm. Heavy steps mounted the stairs. The door opened, and Inspector Lestrade entered, with two uniformed officers behind him. His face was serious.

“Mr. John Hector McFarlane?” he asked.

The young man rose slowly, as if his strength had left him.

“I arrest you,” said Lestrade, “for the wilful murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood.”

McFarlane turned to us with an expression of despair and sank back into his chair. Holmes raised a hand.

“One moment, Lestrade,” he said calmly. “This gentleman was about to give us an account of his connection with the affair. Half an hour can make little difference. It may even assist you.”

Lestrade hesitated. He said that he must remain with his prisoner and warned McFarlane that anything he said could be used in court. The young man declared that he wished for nothing more than to tell the truth.

After a brief pause, Lestrade agreed to allow half an hour. McFarlane wiped his brow and began his story. He said that he had known little of Mr. Jonas Oldacre before the previous afternoon. Though their parents had once been acquainted, the families had long since lost touch. He had therefore been greatly surprised when the older man entered his office in the city.

Mr. Oldacre had carried with him several sheets of paper covered with rough writing. He had placed them on the table and stated that they formed his will. He wished the young solicitor to put them into proper legal form at once. As McFarlane read the draft, he had been astonished to find that, except for a few small gifts, the whole of Mr. Oldacre’s property was left to him.

The older man had watched him closely with sharp gray eyes and had explained that he had no close relations and believed that his money would be safe in the hands of an honest young man. The will had been completed, signed, and witnessed. Mr. Oldacre had then asked McFarlane to come to his house that very evening, bringing the finished will, in order to look over certain papers and deeds.

He had insisted that nothing be said to McFarlane's parents until all was settled. The young man had agreed and had sent word home that he would be late. He had then traveled to Norwood, arriving about half past nine. A housekeeper had opened the door and shown him into a room where supper was laid.

"I found him there," McFarlane said, his voice shaking again.

"One moment," Holmes interrupted quietly. "Who admitted you to the house?"

"A middle-aged woman," McFarlane replied. "I believe she was his housekeeper."

"And she knew your name?"

"Yes. She spoke it at once."

Holmes nodded slightly. "Pray continue," he said.

Part 2

McFarlane drew a deep breath and went on with his story. He said that Mr. Jonas Oldacre had greeted him in a friendly way, though there was something strange in his manner. The older man was small and thin, with a sharp nose and pale eyelashes. His eyes were bright and watchful. They ate a simple supper together. During the meal Mr. Oldacre spoke in a light tone about the will and about the surprise it would bring to McFarlane's parents.

After supper he led the young solicitor into his bedroom, which was on the ground floor and opened onto the garden by French windows. In the room stood a large safe, several chairs, and a writing-table. Mr. Oldacre explained that many important papers were kept in the safe and that it was necessary for McFarlane to examine them carefully, since he would one day be responsible for the property.

They worked together for some time. Papers were taken out and placed upon the table. Leases, title-deeds, and other documents were shown and discussed. McFarlane said that he tried to give close attention to them, though he felt some surprise at the great trust that was being placed in him.

"At last," he continued, "it was nearly midnight. Mr. Oldacre said that we had done enough for one evening. He asked me to place the papers in a small pile

upon the table, as he would return them to the safe later. I gathered them together. Then I rose to take my leave.”

Holmes leaned forward slightly. “The safe remained open?” he asked.

“Yes,” said McFarlane. “It was open while we worked, and I believe it was still open when I left.”

“Pray proceed.”

McFarlane explained that Mr. Oldacre had walked with him to the French windows and had opened them. The night air came in cool and fresh. The garden lay dark beyond. Mr. Oldacre had said that it would be easier for his guest to leave that way rather than pass again through the house and disturb the housekeeper.

The young man had stepped out onto the grass and had crossed the small lawn toward the side gate. He admitted that he had left his walking-stick behind in the bedroom. He had only remembered it after he reached the hotel where he had taken a room for the night. As he believed that he would see Mr. Oldacre again soon, he did not return for it.

“I slept poorly,” he said. “This morning I rose early and went to the station. It was only in the train that I read the newspaper and learned that Mr. Oldacre had disappeared and that I was suspected.”

He ended his account with a look of deep distress. “That is the whole truth,” he said. “I swear it.”

Lestrade, who had listened with folded arms, spoke in a firm voice. “It is a neat story,” he said. “But there are facts which you have not answered. There were signs of a struggle in the room. There were stains of blood. Your stick was found there with blood upon it. The French windows were open, and marks were found in the garden as if something heavy had been dragged across to the wood-stack which later burned.”

McFarlane shook his head. “I know nothing of any struggle,” he said. “Mr. Oldacre was alive and well when I left him. I cannot explain the blood. I cannot explain the fire.”

Holmes rose from his chair and walked slowly across the room. He stood for a moment with his back to us, his head slightly bent. Then he turned.

“Lestrade,” he said, “you will allow me to visit the house in Norwood before this young man is committed for trial?”

“I suppose so,” the inspector replied. “We have nothing to hide. The place is under guard.”

“Excellent,” said Holmes. “In that case, we shall go at once. Mr. McFarlane, you will accompany us. Watson, I trust you will come as well.”

Within half an hour we were on our way to Lower Norwood. McFarlane sat between the two policemen in the carriage, pale but composed. Holmes appeared thoughtful but calm. I could see that his mind was already busy with small details.

Deep Dene House stood at the end of a quiet road. It was a solid building, with a small garden at the front and a larger space behind. The wood-yard lay beyond the garden, and there we saw the blackened remains of the burned stack. A faint smell of smoke still hung in the air.

We entered the house. The middle-aged housekeeper met us, her face anxious and pale. She confirmed that Mr. McFarlane had indeed visited the house the previous evening and had left by the French windows. She said that she had heard no noise during the night until the alarm of fire was raised.

Holmes asked to see the bedroom. The room was in some disorder. Papers lay scattered upon the table and floor. The safe stood open. On the carpet near the table I saw small dark stains. The oak walking-stick rested upon a chair.

Holmes knelt and examined the stains with great care. He said little, but I saw his eyes move quickly from one object to another. He studied the window, the marks upon the floor, and the position of the furniture.

“You say the body has not been found?” he asked Lestrade.

“Only charred remains among the ashes,” the inspector answered. “We believe that the body was dragged out through the window and burned.”

Holmes walked to the French windows and stepped into the garden. He examined the ground slowly. There were faint marks in the earth leading toward the wood-stack. The grass had been pressed down in places.

“Very interesting,” Holmes murmured.

We then went to the wood-yard. The burned stack was now a heap of gray ash

and blackened wood. Holmes moved among it carefully, using a stick to turn over small pieces. He picked up something and held it close to his face. Then he slipped it into his pocket without a word.

Lestrade watched him with a slight smile. "You will find that the facts are simple enough," he said. "The motive is clear. A young man inherits a fortune. He strikes down the old man who made the will. He drags the body out and burns it. The open safe and scattered papers suggest robbery."

Holmes did not answer at once. At last he turned to the inspector.

"You have done well to move quickly," he said. "But there are still one or two small matters which require attention."

McFarlane, who had stood silent during the examination, looked at Holmes with hope in his eyes. "You believe me innocent?" he asked in a low voice.

Holmes regarded him thoughtfully. "I believe," he said slowly, "that this case is not as simple as it appears. Whether you are innocent or guilty, Mr. McFarlane, remains to be proved. But I do not accept the obvious explanation without question."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "You may examine as much as you like," he said. "The man will remain in custody."

As we left the house, I felt that the air was heavy with mystery. The quiet garden, the open safe, the blood-stained stick, and the burned wood all seemed to tell one story. Yet the look in Holmes's eyes told me that another story lay hidden beneath the first.

The young solicitor was taken away under guard. Holmes and I returned to Baker Street in thoughtful silence. At last I spoke.

"What do you think?" I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly. "I think," he said, "that we have not yet seen Mr. Jonas Oldacre for the last time."

Part 3

I looked at Holmes in surprise. "Not seen him for the last time?" I repeated.

“You mean that he may still be alive?”

Holmes did not answer at once. He sat down in his chair, steeped his fingers, and closed his eyes. For several minutes he remained silent. I knew better than to disturb him when he was in such a mood. At last he opened his eyes and spoke in a calm voice.

“There are certain points in this case,” he said, “which do not agree with the simple story presented by Inspector Lestrade. When facts refuse to fit together, one must ask whether the picture itself is false.”

“Which facts trouble you?” I asked.

“First,” Holmes replied, “the will. It is a strange thing that a man should leave his entire fortune to a young solicitor whom he scarcely knows. That in itself is unusual. But more unusual still is the haste with which the will was drawn and the insistence that it be kept secret from the young man’s parents.”

“That is true,” I said.

“Second,” Holmes continued, “the open safe and the scattered papers. If robbery had been the motive, why was nothing taken? And if the safe was open for the purpose of examining documents, why should the papers be thrown about in disorder?”

“It could suggest a struggle,” I offered.

Holmes shook his head slightly. “A struggle may explain the blood and the stick. But it does not explain everything. Consider also the dragging marks in the garden. They were clear, yet oddly placed. And the remains in the ashes—did you observe them closely?”

I admitted that I had not examined them in detail.

Holmes rose and went to his desk. From his pocket he drew a small object wrapped in paper. He unfolded it and laid it before me. It was a small metal button, blackened by fire.

“This,” he said, “I found among the ashes.”

I looked at it carefully. “A button?” I asked.

“Yes. A common trouser-button,” Holmes replied. “If a man’s body had been burned there, we should expect to find bones, teeth, or other solid remains. Instead,

we find little but wood ash and this single button.”

“But there were said to be charred remains,” I said.

“So it is said,” Holmes answered quietly. “Yet no complete body was discovered. The matter is curious.”

He began to pace slowly across the room.

“Let us suppose,” he continued, “that Mr. Jonas Oldacre did not die that night. Let us suppose that he had reason to disappear and to create the appearance of his own death. What then?”

I felt a sudden chill. “You think that he wished to accuse McFarlane falsely?”

Holmes turned sharply. “It is possible. The question is—why?”

We spoke long that evening, going over each detail again. Holmes pointed out that the dragging marks might have been made by a bundle of clothes or other object. He also reminded me that the housekeeper had not seen or heard anything during the night. The fire had been discovered late, when few were about.

The next morning Holmes sent a telegram and then asked me to accompany him once more to Norwood. This time we arrived quietly and entered the house without the presence of Lestrade. Holmes had arranged to speak again with the housekeeper.

The woman appeared nervous but answered our questions. She said that Mr. Oldacre had seemed in good spirits the previous evening. She had gone to bed early and had heard no sound of quarrel or struggle. When Holmes asked whether her master had enemies, she hesitated but then said that he had once spoken bitterly of a former friend who had wronged him.

“What was the name?” Holmes asked.

The woman replied that she believed it was something like McFarlane.

Holmes and I exchanged glances. After leaving the housekeeper, Holmes asked to examine the bedroom once more. He moved the furniture slightly and then stooped near the wall. There was a small space between a cupboard and the plaster.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “tap here.”

I did as he asked. The sound was hollow.

Holmes’s eyes shone. He pressed against the wall and felt along the edge of the

cupboard. At last his fingers found a narrow line. He pushed firmly, and a small hidden door swung inward.

Before us stood a narrow recess, dark and close. From within came a faint movement.

“Mr. Jonas Oldacre,” Holmes said in a steady voice, “you may as well step out.”

There was a low cry, and a small figure pushed its way forward. It was the builder himself, pale and trembling, covered with dust. His eyes were wild as he looked from Holmes to me.

“How—how did you find me?” he stammered.

Holmes smiled faintly. “You left too many signs,” he said. “The ashes told me that no body had been burned. The dragging marks were false. The open safe and scattered papers were arranged to suggest robbery. You wished to destroy yourself in name and to ruin Mr. McFarlane at the same time.”

Oldacre sank onto a chair, his hands shaking.

“He deserved it!” he cried suddenly. “His parents treated me badly years ago. I loved his mother, and she refused me. I wished to strike at them through their son.”

Holmes regarded him without sympathy. “So you made a will in his favor to create a motive. You invited him to your house and arranged for him to leave by the window. You stained his stick with blood from your own finger. You scattered the papers. You hid yourself in this secret place and set fire to the wood-stack to suggest the destruction of your body.”

Oldacre covered his face with his hands.

At that moment Lestrade, who had followed us quietly into the house after receiving Holmes’s telegram, stepped forward.

“This is a pretty piece of work,” he said sharply. “You will answer for it.”

Oldacre was placed under arrest at once. The false charge against McFarlane was withdrawn, and the young man was released from custody. When he heard the news, tears filled his eyes, and he grasped Holmes’s hand in deep gratitude.

That evening, as we sat once more in Baker Street, I could not help but admire the clear reasoning which had uncovered the truth.

“It was the simplest of tricks,” Holmes said modestly. “When a man disappears

and no body is found, one must always ask whether he truly died. The motive lay in the past, not in money. Once that was seen, the rest followed.”

He leaned back in his chair, his face calm once more.

“London may lack a Moriarty,” he added, “but it still offers enough small problems to keep the mind alive.”

And so ended the strange affair of the Norwood builder, in which a false death and a hidden room nearly destroyed an innocent life.

The Adventure of the Dancing Men

Part 1

It was in the early years after Holmes had returned to London that a case came to us which at first seemed no more than a strange joke. Yet it grew, step by step, into one of the most serious and painful matters in which I had ever seen my friend engaged. I remember the day clearly. The sky over Baker Street was gray, and a light rain beat softly against the window. Holmes sat at the table, turning over some papers with a look of mild interest.

A card had been brought up by Mrs. Hudson. It bore the name “Mr. Hilton Cubitt, of Riding Thorpe Manor, Norfolk.” Holmes read it and raised his eyebrows slightly. “A country gentleman,” he said. “Let us see what trouble has driven him to London.”

A tall, strong man entered, with open features and honest blue eyes. His manner was simple and direct. He wore country clothes, and there was a look of quiet strength about him. Yet I noticed at once that he seemed troubled. His face, though firm, showed signs of strain.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes?” he asked.

Holmes bowed slightly and motioned him to a chair. “You have come from Norfolk, I understand,” he said.

“Yes,” the man replied. “From Riding Thorpe Manor. I am Hilton Cubitt. I have come about my wife.”

There was something in his tone that made me attentive at once. Holmes leaned forward a little.

“Pray tell us the matter from the beginning,” he said. “No detail is too small.”

Mr. Cubitt clasped his hands together for a moment before speaking. “I married about a year ago,” he said. “My wife was then Miss Elsie Patrick. I met her while traveling in America. She is of good family and has had a fine education. Yet before we were married she made one request of me.”

“What was that?” Holmes asked.

“She told me that there had been something in her past which she wished to forget. She asked me never to question her about her former life. She promised that she would be a loyal and loving wife, but she begged that the past should remain closed.”

Holmes nodded. “And you agreed?”

“I did,” Cubitt answered firmly. “I trusted her. I trust her still. She has been a good wife to me. Yet some weeks ago a strange thing began to happen.”

He drew from his pocket a folded paper and laid it upon the table. Holmes opened it. I saw that it bore a number of small drawings. They looked like little figures of men, drawn in simple lines, each in a different pose. Some had small flags in their hands. They were arranged in a row.

“These were found upon a window-sill in my house,” Cubitt said. “They were drawn in chalk. My wife saw them first. When she did, her face turned pale, and she asked me to promise that I would not question her about them.”

Holmes studied the paper carefully. “These are what I should call dancing men,” he said quietly. “Each figure in a different position. Most curious.”

“There were more of them later,” Cubitt went on. “They appeared again, drawn upon a sundial in the garden. My wife grew even more troubled. She would not explain their meaning, but I could see that she feared them.”

“And you?” Holmes asked.

“At first I thought it a foolish trick,” Cubitt admitted. “Some village boy playing a game. But then a letter came. It bore no writing, only more of these little dancing figures. When my wife saw it, she fainted.”

The strong man's voice shook slightly as he spoke. It was clear that he loved his wife deeply and that her fear had touched him. Holmes folded his long fingers and looked thoughtful.

"Did she ever admit that she understood these signs?" he asked.

"No," Cubitt replied. "But her face told me that she did. She begged me not to interfere. She said that if I trusted her and did nothing, all would be well. Yet I could not stand by while she suffered."

Holmes nodded slowly. "You have done wisely to come," he said. "May I ask whether these drawings continue to appear?"

"Yes," Cubitt answered. "They come at intervals. Sometimes upon paper, sometimes upon walls or doors. Always these small dancing men."

He produced several more sheets, each covered with rows of figures. Holmes laid them side by side and began to examine them closely. His eyes shone with quiet interest.

"There is method here," he murmured. "This is no random drawing. See how certain figures repeat. There is pattern, therefore meaning."

Cubitt leaned forward eagerly. "You think it is some kind of message?"

"Without doubt," Holmes replied. "It is a form of code."

I felt a thrill at his words. A secret language made of simple drawings—such a thing seemed at once childish and dangerous.

"Do you suspect anyone?" Holmes asked.

Cubitt hesitated. "There was one man in America," he said at last. "A man named Abe Slaney. My wife once spoke his name with fear. But she would tell me nothing more."

Holmes looked up sharply. "And this man—do you believe he has followed her to England?"

"I do not know," Cubitt said. "But I fear it."

Holmes rose and walked slowly across the room. "We must see these drawings in their place," he said. "I will come with you to Norfolk."

Cubitt's face showed relief. "You will come at once?" he asked.

"At once," Holmes replied. "Watson, you will join us."

Within a short time we were on our way to Riding Thorpe Manor. As the train moved through the countryside, Cubitt spoke little. He stared from the window, his strong hands clenched upon his knees. I saw that beneath his calm manner lay deep anxiety.

Holmes, meanwhile, studied the sheets of dancing figures again and again. He traced them lightly with his finger, counting, comparing, noting which appeared most often. At last he leaned back with a look of quiet satisfaction.

“I believe I am on the edge of understanding,” he said softly.

When we reached the manor, a large and comfortable house set among green fields, Mrs. Cubitt met us at the door. She was a woman of grace and beauty, yet her face was pale, and dark circles lay beneath her eyes. When she saw Holmes, she tried to smile, but her hands trembled slightly.

“My husband has told you?” she asked in a low voice.

“He has told me enough to know that you are in distress,” Holmes answered gently. “If you trust me, I may be able to help.”

For a moment she seemed about to speak openly. Then she shook her head.

“I cannot,” she whispered. “It is better that you do not know.”

Holmes did not press her. Instead, he asked to see the places where the drawings had appeared. We went to the window-sill, where faint traces of chalk still remained. We walked into the garden to the sundial, upon which fresh figures had been drawn that very morning.

Holmes bent close and copied them carefully into his notebook. I saw that his face had grown serious.

“These messages are growing bolder,” he said quietly. “Whoever sends them is near.”

A shadow passed over Mrs. Cubitt’s face.

“He will not dare,” she said quickly. “He would not harm us.”

Holmes looked at her with sharp attention. “You know who it is, then?” he asked softly.

She turned away and did not answer.

That evening we sat together in the drawing-room. Outside, the wind moved

softly through the trees. Holmes spread the copied figures before him and began to write letters beneath them.

“It is a simple substitution code,” he explained to me in a low voice. “Each figure stands for a letter of the alphabet. The most common figure must represent the most common letter.”

I watched as he filled in more and more letters. Slowly, a word began to form. Holmes looked up at me.

“The name,” he said quietly, “is Slaney.”

Part 2

When Holmes spoke the name “Slaney,” I saw Mrs. Cubitt’s hand grip the arm of her chair. Her face, already pale, grew whiter still. She tried to speak calmly, but her voice was unsteady.

“You have read it?” she asked.

“Yes,” Holmes replied gently. “The figures spell the name Slaney. That name has appeared more than once in these messages.”

Hilton Cubitt turned quickly toward his wife. “Elsie,” he said, “tell us the truth. Is this man the one you feared?”

She looked at her husband with deep sadness. “I wished to spare you,” she said softly. “I hoped that if I ignored him, he would leave us in peace.”

Holmes leaned forward. “This man Slaney,” he said, “is he from your past in America?”

Mrs. Cubitt bowed her head. “Yes,” she whispered. “He was once—” She stopped and pressed her hands together. “He was once connected with people who did not live honest lives. I left that world. I married Mr. Cubitt and came here to begin again.”

Hilton Cubitt rose and walked to her side. “You owe me no shame,” he said firmly. “Whatever your past, you are my wife.”

Holmes watched them with quiet respect. “It appears,” he said after a moment, “that this man Slaney has followed you to England. He sends these messages in

the hope of drawing you back.”

Mrs. Cubitt shuddered. “He would not harm me,” she said quickly. “He only wishes to speak with me.”

Holmes’s eyes were keen. “The later messages are more urgent,” he said. “They show impatience. This morning’s drawing contains a short sentence. It reads: ‘Come here at once.’”

Cubitt’s face darkened. “He dares to command you?” he cried.

“The matter is serious,” Holmes said quietly. “If Slaney grows desperate, he may act rashly. We must be ready.”

That night Holmes remained wakeful long after the rest of us had retired. He studied the coded figures and wrote down the full alphabet which he had worked out. Each little dancing man stood now for a letter. The code was simple but cleverly disguised.

Early the next morning another message appeared. It had been drawn upon the stone near the garden gate. Holmes copied it carefully.

“This one reads,” he said gravely, “‘Elsie, prepare to meet thy God.’”

Mrs. Cubitt cried out softly when she heard the words. Hilton Cubitt’s face grew hard with anger.

“This must end,” he said. “I will find this man.”

Holmes held up a hand. “We must act with care,” he said. “If you confront him in anger, it may bring danger to your wife.”

He then asked that a watch be kept upon the grounds, but without alarm. He himself walked quietly about the garden, examining every corner. He noted footprints near the hedge and signs that someone had stood beyond the wall.

“He watches the house,” Holmes said. “He is near.”

That evening a final message was delivered, not in chalk but on a small scrap of paper thrown through the open window. It bore more dancing figures. Holmes studied them at once.

“This says,” he read slowly, “‘I am here.’”

Mrs. Cubitt’s lips trembled. “He has come,” she said.

Holmes turned to Hilton Cubitt. “You must remain calm,” he said. “If he

approaches the house, I shall deal with him.”

Yet fate did not wait for Holmes to act. In the early hours of the morning I was awakened by the sound of a gunshot. It rang sharp and loud in the still air. I sprang from my bed and rushed into the corridor. Holmes was already there.

We ran toward the sound and found Hilton Cubitt lying upon the floor of the study. A pistol lay near his hand. Blood stained his shirt. Across the room Mrs. Cubitt lay unconscious, a small wound at her temple. A second pistol was on the carpet beside her.

The scene was terrible. Holmes knelt beside Cubitt and examined him quickly. Then he rose with a grave face.

“He is dead,” he said quietly.

Mrs. Cubitt still breathed. We carried her to her room and sent at once for the doctor. Holmes returned to the study and examined the room with deep attention.

“This is no simple murder,” he murmured.

He looked at the pistols and the position of the bodies. The window stood open. Upon the sill was another scrap of paper bearing dancing figures.

Holmes picked it up and read.

““Come here at once,”” he translated softly.

He stood very still for a moment, his face pale but firm.

“Watson,” he said at last, “this man Slaney must be taken without delay.”

He wrote a short note in clear letters. It read: “Come here at once. I have received your message. Elsie.”

“We shall answer him in his own language,” Holmes said.

He then copied the same words into the code of dancing men and sent a servant to place the message where Slaney would see it.

“If he believes that Mrs. Cubitt has called him,” Holmes explained, “he will come.”

We waited in deep tension. Before long a figure appeared beyond the hedge and entered the garden cautiously. It was a tall man with dark hair and bold features. His eyes moved quickly as he approached the house.

Holmes stepped forward. “Abe Slaney,” he said calmly, “I arrest you for the

murder of Hilton Cubitt.”

The man started in surprise. “Murder?” he cried. “I never meant harm. I came only to see Elsie.”

He tried to draw a weapon, but Holmes was quicker. Within moments Slaney was disarmed and held fast.

“You sent the threats,” Holmes said sternly. “You forced her into fear. When her husband confronted you, shots were fired.”

Slaney’s face changed. “He fired first,” he said hoarsely. “I shot back. I never meant to hit her.”

Holmes looked at him with cold eyes. “Your threats led to this. You used fear to bind her to you. You left her no peace.”

Slaney was taken into custody. Later, when Mrs. Cubitt regained consciousness, she wept deeply upon learning of her husband’s death. Holmes spoke gently to her and told her that Slaney had been arrested.

As we prepared to leave Norfolk, Holmes reflected quietly upon the case.

“A simple code,” he said, “and yet it carried great danger. A man’s past, when not faced openly, may return in darker form.”

I looked back at Riding Thorpe Manor as our carriage drove away. The quiet fields and trees seemed unchanged, yet a life had been broken there. Holmes sat beside me, silent and thoughtful.

“In this affair,” he said at last, “the dancing men were not mere drawings. They were the steps that led to tragedy.”

And so ended the adventure of the dancing men, a case in which a secret message, once playful in appearance, became the shadow of death.

The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist

Part 1

It was during a quiet period in the late autumn that the case of the solitary cyclist came before us. The air in London had grown cold, and a thin mist lay along Baker

Street. Holmes had been restless for several days, as often happened when no work of interest occupied his mind. He sat by the fire, his long fingers steepled, staring into the flames as if he hoped that some mystery might rise from them.

Our peace was broken one afternoon by the arrival of a young lady. Mrs. Hudson announced her, and she entered with a look of anxiety upon her face. She was neatly dressed in dark clothes suited for travel, and there was a firmness in her manner which suggested independence. Yet her eyes showed signs of recent distress.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes?” she asked.

Holmes rose and bowed slightly. “Pray be seated, madam,” he said. “You have come to consult me. My friend Dr. Watson is here, and you may speak freely.”

She sat down and removed her gloves slowly, as if gathering courage. “My name is Miss Violet Smith,” she began. “I have come from Farnham, in Surrey. I believe that I am being followed.”

Holmes leaned forward with interest. “Followed?” he repeated. “By whom?”

“I do not know,” she answered. “But for several weeks, whenever I ride my bicycle from my home to the railway station, a man on another bicycle appears behind me. He keeps his distance and does not speak. Yet he follows me along the lonely road.”

I saw Holmes’s eyes brighten slightly. “And you are certain that this is no chance meeting?” he asked.

“Quite certain,” she replied. “It has happened too often. At first I thought it an accident. But now I am sure that the man watches me.”

Holmes nodded. “You ride alone?”

“Yes,” she said. “I live at a house called Chiltern Grange. I am employed there as a music teacher.”

She explained that she had recently taken the position after a change in her family’s circumstances. Her father had died, and she and her mother had been left in difficult conditions. Two gentlemen, Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Woodley, had offered assistance and had arranged for her employment at Chiltern Grange. She traveled several days each week to give lessons in the town.

“The road I use,” she continued, “is quiet and lined with trees. There are few houses. It is there that the cyclist appears.”

“Describe him,” Holmes said.

“He is tall and thin. He wears a dark beard and rides well. He keeps always some distance behind me. If I slow down, he slows also. If I turn suddenly, he turns as well. Yet he never comes close.”

“Have you ever spoken to him?” Holmes asked.

“No,” she replied. “I once tried to wait and let him pass, but he stopped and pretended to adjust his bicycle. When I rode on, he followed again.”

Holmes considered this in silence.

“And the gentlemen at Chiltern Grange?” he asked. “What is their character?”

Miss Smith hesitated. “Mr. Carruthers is quiet and kind,” she said. “He is older and seems thoughtful. Mr. Woodley, however, is loud and rough in his manner. I dislike him. He once made an unwelcome proposal of marriage to me, which I firmly refused.”

Holmes’s expression grew more attentive. “Did he accept your refusal?”

“He was angry,” she admitted. “But he left the house soon after and has not returned.”

“And Mr. Carruthers?” Holmes asked.

“He has shown me only respect,” she replied. “Yet he has seemed troubled of late.”

Holmes rose and began to pace slowly across the room.

“You say that the cyclist has followed you for several weeks,” he said. “Has he ever approached your house?”

“No,” she answered. “He appears only upon the road.”

“Have you told Mr. Carruthers of this matter?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” she said. “He appeared concerned and offered to arrange for a carriage instead of my bicycle. But I prefer my independence.”

Holmes smiled faintly. “Independence is admirable,” he said. “Yet safety must come first.”

He turned to me. “Watson,” he said, “this is a matter which requires personal

observation. I think we shall visit Farnham.”

Miss Smith looked relieved. “You will come?” she asked.

“Certainly,” Holmes replied. “Until we understand the purpose of this pursuit, we cannot dismiss it as harmless.”

Within a day we traveled to Surrey and arrived near Chiltern Grange. The countryside was peaceful, with open fields and narrow roads bordered by hedges. It seemed an unlikely place for danger. Yet Holmes reminded me that crime does not always dwell in cities.

Miss Smith agreed to ride her usual route while we concealed ourselves at a point along the road. We waited among the trees. The afternoon was quiet, and the only sound was the wind moving through the leaves.

Soon we saw her approach, riding steadily along the path. After a short interval, another figure appeared in the distance. The man matched her speed exactly. He remained far enough behind to avoid suspicion, yet close enough to keep her in sight.

Holmes watched with keen attention. “Just as she described,” he murmured.

When Miss Smith reached the bend in the road where we stood hidden, Holmes stepped out suddenly and raised his hand. The cyclist behind saw him and turned at once. In a moment he had vanished down a side path.

Holmes made no attempt to pursue him.

“We have confirmed her account,” he said calmly. “The question remains—why does he follow her?”

That evening we visited Chiltern Grange. Mr. Carruthers received us politely. He was a tall, serious man with dark hair and thoughtful eyes. His manner was gentle, yet I sensed a strong feeling beneath it.

When Holmes asked him about the cyclist, he appeared troubled.

“I have advised Miss Smith to take more care,” he said. “I cannot explain the man’s actions.”

Holmes regarded him steadily. “You have no suspicion?” he asked.

Carruthers shook his head.

As we left the house, Holmes spoke in a low voice.

“Watson,” he said, “there is more here than a simple act of following. The man’s caution suggests purpose. And where there is purpose, there is plan.”

The quiet road and the solitary cyclist had begun to reveal the shadow of something darker beneath the calm surface of Surrey life.

Part 2

The following morning Holmes proposed a more careful plan. “It is not enough to see that the man follows,” he said. “We must learn who he is and why he does so. There is no use in chasing him blindly through lanes and fields.”

Miss Smith agreed to ride again at her usual hour. This time Holmes arranged matters differently. He persuaded her to accept a small change in route at one particular bend where a narrow track joined the main road. I was placed at one point of observation, while Holmes concealed himself further along.

As before, Miss Smith rode steadily along the quiet road. The day was bright, and the countryside looked peaceful. Yet there was tension in the air. Soon the cyclist appeared again in the distance. He kept the same careful space between himself and his target.

When Miss Smith reached the agreed point, she slowed slightly. The following man slowed also. At that instant Holmes sprang from his hiding place and moved quickly toward the cyclist. The man turned sharply and rode away at great speed.

Holmes ran after him for some distance but soon stopped.

“He is strong and practiced,” he said when he returned. “We cannot take him so easily. But I have seen his face clearly.”

“Do you know him?” I asked.

“Not by name,” Holmes replied. “But I believe that he is no stranger to this district.”

That afternoon Holmes requested a private conversation with Miss Smith. She appeared anxious but composed.

“There is something you have not told us,” Holmes said gently. “I do not accuse you of deceit, but I believe you fear to speak openly.”

She hesitated for a moment and then nodded. “It concerns Mr. Woodley,” she said.

“The gentleman who made the proposal you refused?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “After I refused him, he left the house in anger. But before he went, he said something which troubled me. He spoke of a plan. He hinted that I would regret my decision.”

Holmes’s eyes narrowed slightly. “And Mr. Carruthers—what is his relation to Woodley?”

“They were once partners in some venture,” she answered. “I do not know the details. But I believe they are not on friendly terms now.”

Holmes thanked her and later spoke quietly to me.

“There is conflict between these two men,” he said. “Miss Smith is at the center of it.”

That evening Holmes paid a visit to a small inn not far from the Grange. He returned with information.

“The cyclist,” he told me, “is known in the district. He lodges under the name of Peters. He is quiet and keeps to himself. Yet he is seen often near the road that Miss Smith travels.”

“So he may be Woodley?” I asked.

Holmes shook his head. “No. Woodley is described as a heavy, rough man with red hair. The cyclist is dark and slender. They are not the same.”

“Then who sends him?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly. “That is the question.”

The next development came suddenly. One afternoon, as Miss Smith returned from the station, she was stopped on the road by a carriage. A large man stepped out and blocked her path. She later told us that it was Woodley himself. He had returned without warning.

He spoke to her roughly and tried to force her into the carriage. She resisted with courage and cried out. At that moment another rider appeared upon the road—the solitary cyclist. He threw himself between Woodley and the young woman.

A struggle followed. Woodley struck the cyclist and attempted again to seize Miss Smith. But the interruption had given her time to escape. She rode quickly away toward the house.

When Holmes heard of this, his face grew grave.

“The matter has moved from watching to violence,” he said. “We must act at once.”

He went directly to Chiltern Grange and demanded to see Mr. Carruthers. The two men spoke in private for some time. When they emerged, Carruthers appeared deeply disturbed.

“You have concealed much,” Holmes said sternly. “If you continue to do so, you place Miss Smith in greater danger.”

Carruthers’s face showed conflict. At last he spoke.

“I care for her deeply,” he admitted. “I have watched over her from a distance to protect her.”

“You are the cyclist,” Holmes said calmly.

Carruthers bowed his head. “Yes.”

I confess that this revelation surprised me greatly.

“Then why hide?” Holmes asked.

“Because she would not accept my protection openly,” Carruthers replied. “And because Woodley is a violent man. He wished to force her into marriage for her inheritance. He believed that by marriage he could gain control of her fortune.”

Holmes regarded him steadily. “And you?” he asked.

Carruthers’s voice grew low. “I love her,” he said simply. “But I would never force her.”

Holmes nodded once.

“Your method of protection was clumsy,” he said. “Your secrecy bred fear. Yet your intention may have been honest.”

Carruthers lifted his eyes. “Woodley has grown desperate,” he said. “He has spoken of extreme measures.”

Holmes turned to me. “We must not delay,” he said. “Woodley will attempt something more serious.”

That very night the crisis came. Miss Smith was lured from the house by a false message. She was seized by Woodley and taken to a small cottage some miles away. Carruthers, learning of her absence, rode after them at once.

Holmes and I followed swiftly in a hired carriage. When we reached the cottage, we heard raised voices within. Holmes burst through the door.

Woodley stood in the center of the room, his face red with anger. A clergyman sat bound to a chair, forced to perform a mock ceremony. Miss Smith stood pale but defiant.

“This farce ends now,” Holmes said sharply.

Woodley turned, but Carruthers had already entered behind us. There was a brief struggle. Woodley drew a pistol, but Holmes struck his arm aside. The weapon fell harmlessly to the floor.

The police, summoned earlier by Holmes, arrived moments later. Woodley was arrested. The clergyman was freed, and Miss Smith, though shaken, was unharmed.

Carruthers stood apart, his face marked by deep feeling.

“I wished only to protect her,” he said quietly.

Holmes looked at him with measured expression. “Your method was mistaken,” he said. “But you acted at last with courage.”

In the days that followed, Woodley faced charges for his actions. Carruthers, though guilty of secrecy, was spared harsher judgment due to his role in saving Miss Smith from greater harm.

As Holmes and I returned to London, I reflected upon the strange chain of events.

“The solitary cyclist,” I said, “was at once a threat and a guardian.”

Holmes nodded thoughtfully. “Appearances deceive,” he said. “The man who follows may be protector, and the man who speaks openly may conceal danger.”

Thus ended the adventure of the solitary cyclist, a case in which watchfulness turned to courage and hidden motives were revealed beneath the calm roads of Surrey.

The Adventure of the Priory School

Part 1

It was during one of those cold, clear mornings in the early winter that the case of the Priory School came before us. Holmes and I had just finished breakfast in Baker Street when Mrs. Hudson announced that a gentleman wished to see my friend on a matter of great urgency. The visitor entered at once, and I saw that he was a man of noble bearing, though his face showed deep strain.

He was tall and thin, with sharp features and proud eyes. His clothes were rich but worn in haste, and his manner was restless. He did not sit at once but stood before Holmes as if he could scarcely control his emotion.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said in a voice that trembled despite his effort to remain firm, “I am the Duke of Holderness.”

I confess that I started at this announcement. The name was well known throughout England. Holmes, however, showed no surprise. He bowed slightly and motioned to a chair.

“Pray be seated, your Grace,” he said calmly. “How may I serve you?”

The Duke sank into the chair and passed a hand across his forehead. “It concerns my only son,” he said. “He has disappeared.”

Holmes leaned forward slightly. “Your son’s age?” he asked.

“He is ten years old,” the Duke replied. “He was at the Priory School, near Mackleton, in the north of England.”

Holmes nodded for him to continue.

“Three days ago,” the Duke went on, “the boy left the school during the night. He has not been seen since.”

“Left the school of his own will?” Holmes asked.

“It appears so,” the Duke answered. “His bed was empty in the morning. His clothes were gone. The window of his room was open.”

Holmes’s eyes grew thoughtful. “And the schoolmaster?” he asked.

“Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable,” the Duke replied. “He is an honest and capable

man. The school is of high reputation.”

As if summoned by the mention of his name, another figure appeared at the door. He was large and stout, with a face red from anxiety and travel. He entered hurriedly, bowed deeply to the Duke, and then turned to Holmes.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said breathlessly, “I have come from the north without delay. We are in great distress. The boy is gone, and one of my teachers has also vanished.”

“Which teacher?” Holmes asked.

“The German master, Mr. Heidegger,” Huxtable replied. “His bed too was found empty.”

Holmes rose slowly. “This grows more interesting,” he said. “A boy of noble birth disappears from a strict school at night, and a master vanishes at the same time. Pray, Dr. Huxtable, tell us every detail.”

The schoolmaster described the events with great care. The Priory School stood in a quiet area, surrounded by fields and moorland. The boy, Lord Saltire, had seemed quiet but not unhappy. On the night of his disappearance, nothing unusual had been heard. In the morning his absence was discovered, and shortly afterward it was found that Mr. Heidegger was also missing.

“Were there signs of struggle?” Holmes asked.

“None,” Huxtable replied. “Only that the window had been opened. The ground below showed faint marks as if two persons had passed.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened. “Two persons?”

“Yes,” said Huxtable. “Small footprints, which we took to be the boy’s, and larger ones beside them.”

“And these tracks?” Holmes asked.

“They led across the field toward the road,” Huxtable answered. “But beyond that we could find nothing clear.”

The Duke spoke again, his voice tight with controlled emotion. “Mr. Holmes, my son must be found. Whatever the cost, you must discover the truth.”

Holmes regarded him steadily. “I shall do my utmost,” he said. “But I must ask a delicate question. Has there been any family dispute or matter which might

affect the boy?"

A shadow passed over the Duke's face. "My wife and I are separated," he said coldly. "The boy was sent to school to remove him from influence."

Holmes did not pursue the matter at once. Instead, he asked further questions about the school, the staff, and the grounds. He learned that Mr. Heidegger had served faithfully for years and was not known to be dishonest. The boy had no known enemies.

"When did you discover the disappearance?" Holmes asked.

"At six in the morning," Huxtable replied. "We searched at once but found nothing more."

Holmes turned to me. "Watson," he said quietly, "we must travel north without delay."

The Duke rose. "My carriage waits," he said.

Within hours we were on our way. The journey was long, and as the train moved through the winter countryside, Holmes sat in deep thought. Dr. Huxtable spoke little, his face marked by fatigue. The Duke remained silent, his proud features fixed in stern lines.

When we reached the Priory School, I saw that it stood in a lonely but beautiful setting. The building was large and solid, with wide grounds stretching toward the open moor. The air was cold and clear.

Holmes began his examination at once. He visited the boy's room and studied the open window. He knelt by the ground outside and examined the soil carefully.

"The tracks are faint," he said. "But they are present."

I saw small marks, indeed, and beside them the deeper impression of an adult's step. Holmes followed them slowly across the field.

"Two persons left the building," he murmured. "The boy and a man."

"Then Heidegger is guilty?" Huxtable asked anxiously.

Holmes did not answer at once. He continued to trace the marks until they faded upon the harder ground near the road.

"There is more here," he said quietly. "We must search the surrounding country."

The lonely moorland stretched wide before us, and a sense of mystery lay heavy

in the cold northern air.

Part 2

Holmes did not waste a moment. After studying the fading tracks near the road, he stood still for some time, looking over the wide stretch of moorland before us. The ground rose gently in the distance, broken here and there by small clumps of bushes and rough grass. It was a lonely place, and I felt at once how easy it would be for a child and a man to vanish there without notice.

“We must extend our search outward,” Holmes said quietly. “The tracks cannot simply disappear into the air.”

Dr. Huxtable walked beside us, his face pale from worry. “We have searched the grounds,” he said. “We have ridden across the fields. We found nothing.”

“You searched in lines,” Holmes replied calmly. “We must search in thought.”

He began to move slowly along the road, scanning the surface with careful eyes. After a short distance he stopped and knelt down. I saw that he had noticed something small but important.

“A bicycle,” he murmured.

There were faint marks in the dust at the side of the road. Holmes traced them with his finger.

“A man on foot, leading a child,” he said softly. “And here—another set of impressions. Narrow wheels. A bicycle has passed.”

“Heidegger owned a bicycle,” Huxtable exclaimed.

Holmes shook his head slightly. “Perhaps. But let us not decide too quickly.”

We followed the faint wheel-marks for some distance. At times they were clear; at times they vanished upon harder ground. Holmes’s patience never failed. He moved steadily forward, often bending low, sometimes stopping for several minutes to consider.

After a mile or more, we came upon a small hollow sheltered by rising land. There, lying upon the ground, was a bicycle. Its frame was twisted, and one wheel was broken.

Huxtable gave a cry. "It is Heidegger's!" he said.

Holmes examined the machine carefully. "Yes," he said. "It bears his initials."

A few yards away, among the rough grass, lay the body of Mr. Heidegger.

I felt a chill as I approached. The poor man lay upon his side, his face turned partly toward the earth. There was a dark mark upon his head. It was clear that he had been struck violently.

"He is dead," I said quietly after a brief examination.

Dr. Huxtable covered his face with his hands. "This is terrible," he whispered.

Holmes stood silent for a moment, his expression grave.

"He did not fall from the bicycle," he said at last. "The blow came from behind. He was struck with force."

"Then he was not the one who took the boy?" Huxtable asked faintly.

Holmes shook his head. "No. He followed. He tried to rescue the child."

I saw the logic at once. The broken bicycle, the position of the body, and the wound upon the head all suggested pursuit rather than guilt.

"The child's tracks?" I asked.

Holmes pointed ahead. "They continue."

Indeed, faint impressions could still be seen leading away from the scene. The larger tracks, however, were different. Holmes bent again to study them.

"These are not the same as before," he said quietly.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The earlier tracks beside the boy's were lighter," Holmes explained. "These are deeper. The stride is longer. Another man has joined the path."

The Duke, who had ridden out to meet us and now stood near, listened with stern attention.

"You believe my son was taken by force?" he asked.

"I believe he left the school willingly," Holmes said carefully. "He may have been persuaded by someone he trusted. But once beyond the school, matters changed."

We continued to follow the trail across the rough land. The cold wind blew hard, and the ground grew more uneven. After some distance the tracks led toward a

line of trees and then down into a narrow valley.

Holmes paused at the edge.

“Here the story becomes clearer,” he said.

We descended slowly. In the soft earth below, the marks were easier to see. The child’s steps were close together. The larger footprints walked beside them for a while and then changed position.

“At this point,” Holmes said, “the child was carried.”

“Carried?” the Duke repeated sharply.

Holmes pointed to the ground. The smaller tracks had vanished for several yards, while the larger impressions grew deeper.

“The man lifted him,” Holmes said quietly. “Perhaps the boy was tired. Perhaps he resisted.”

I felt the Duke’s tension beside me, yet he remained silent.

The trail led toward a distant farmhouse, isolated upon the moor. Smoke rose faintly from its chimney. Holmes straightened and looked toward it with firm resolve.

“We shall find the answer there,” he said.

As we approached, we saw that the house was old and somewhat neglected. A man stood in the yard, watching us with wary eyes. He was tall, with rough features and dark hair.

Holmes stepped forward calmly.

“Good day,” he said. “We are searching for a child who has passed this way.”

The man hesitated. “No one has come here,” he said roughly.

Holmes’s gaze did not waver. “Your boots,” he said quietly, “bear the same pattern as the prints we have followed.”

The man’s face changed slightly.

At that moment a sound came from within the house—a faint cry.

The Duke moved forward at once, but Holmes held up his hand.

“We shall proceed carefully,” he said.

Within minutes the police, who had been sent for earlier by Holmes’s arrangement, arrived. The man attempted no further resistance.

Inside the farmhouse, in a small room at the back, we found Lord Saltire alive though pale and frightened. He ran at once to his father.

The Duke knelt and embraced him silently.

Holmes turned to the man who had been seized.

“You have acted as tool for another,” he said calmly. “The question now is—who planned this?”

The man lowered his eyes and remained silent.

As we left the farmhouse with the rescued child, I looked back at the lonely moor. The wind still swept across it, as if nothing had happened. Yet a grave crime had been played out upon that quiet land.

Holmes walked beside me, thoughtful.

“The schoolmaster was innocent,” he said. “He gave his life in pursuit of the boy.”

“And the true mind behind the crime?” I asked.

Holmes’s eyes turned briefly toward the Duke, who walked ahead with his son.

“That,” he said softly, “is a matter we must consider with care.”

The case of the Priory School was not yet fully explained, and I sensed that the deeper truth lay still hidden beneath the surface of events.

The Adventure of Black Peter

Part 1

It was in the late summer, when London lay heavy under warm air and long days, that the case of Black Peter came before us. Holmes had been spending much of his time upon the Sussex coast, studying certain small matters connected with bee-keeping, which he had lately taken up with unusual interest. I had joined him for a short visit when a message arrived requesting his help in a matter of murder.

The message came from Inspector Stanley Hopkins, a young officer of the police who had already shown both energy and ambition. Holmes had taken some

interest in him and was pleased to guide his early efforts. Hopkins's telegram was brief but urgent. It concerned the death of a man known locally as "Black Peter."

"Black Peter?" I said when Holmes read the message aloud.

"The name is familiar," Holmes replied thoughtfully. "It belongs to Peter Carey, once a captain in the northern seas."

He explained that Carey had been a seafaring man who hunted whales and seals in distant waters. He had earned a reputation for strength and harsh temper. Since retiring from the sea, he had lived in a small cottage near Forest Row in Sussex. His manner had grown no softer with age.

"A violent man," Holmes said quietly. "Let us see what has overtaken him."

We traveled at once to Forest Row. The countryside there was peaceful, with fields and wooded areas stretching under a clear sky. It seemed a strange setting for a violent death. Inspector Hopkins met us at the small inn where we were to stay.

He was eager and pale from lack of sleep.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Holmes," he said. "The case is serious, and I wish to avoid error."

"Tell us everything," Holmes replied calmly.

Hopkins explained that Peter Carey lived alone with his wife and daughter. Though he kept to himself, his temper was well known. He had built for himself a small wooden hut some distance from the cottage, where he often slept and drank. He called it his cabin and had furnished it in the manner of a ship's room.

Two nights before our arrival, loud cries had been heard from the direction of the hut. Yet such sounds were not uncommon when Carey drank, and no one investigated at once. The following morning, when a young man approached the hut, he found the door locked from within and no response to his calls.

Later, when the door was forced open, a terrible sight was revealed.

"He was fastened to the wall," Hopkins said, his voice low. "Pinned there by a harpoon."

I felt a chill at his words.

"Pinned?" I repeated.

“Yes,” Hopkins said. “The weapon had been driven clean through him into the wooden wall behind. It required great strength.”

Holmes’s eyes grew sharp. “And the hut was locked from the inside?”

“Yes,” Hopkins answered. “The key was found within.”

“Any sign of robbery?” Holmes asked.

“A tin box was found open,” Hopkins replied. “It bore the letters ‘P.C.’ But nothing of value appears to have been taken.”

“And other objects in the room?” Holmes continued.

“There was a bottle of rum and two glasses upon the table,” Hopkins said. “One glass had been used. The other was full.”

Holmes nodded slightly.

“Then Carey had a visitor,” he said quietly.

We walked at once to the hut. It stood apart from the cottage, surrounded by trees. The door had been repaired after being forced open, but Hopkins unlocked it for us.

The interior was small and dark, lit only by a narrow window. The walls were decorated with weapons from the sea—harpoons, knives, and ropes. In the center stood a rough table. Upon the wall opposite the door, I saw the dark stain where Carey had been found.

Holmes moved slowly about the room, examining every detail. He studied the floor, the table, and the walls with deep attention. His manner was quiet but intense.

“The blow was delivered from the front,” he murmured. “The man stood here.”

He pointed to a position near the table.

“Carey must have been seated,” Holmes continued. “The harpoon was seized from the wall and driven with force.”

I looked at the weapon rack. One harpoon was missing.

“Great strength indeed,” I said.

“Or great fear,” Holmes replied softly.

Hopkins showed us the tin box found upon the table. It had contained certain papers, now removed for examination. Holmes asked to see them.

Among the papers was a small notebook. Its cover was worn, and inside were strange figures and letters. Some pages bore entries of money and names. Others contained rough notes.

“This was found near the body,” Hopkins said. “It does not belong to Carey.”

Holmes turned the pages carefully.

“The initials J.H.N. appear here,” he said quietly. “And figures beside them. This notebook may be important.”

“We have questioned the family,” Hopkins added. “They say that Carey had few visitors. Yet on the evening before his death, he was seen speaking with a young man near the hut.”

“Describe him,” Holmes said.

“He was pale and nervous,” Hopkins replied. “A stranger in the village.”

Holmes closed the notebook and placed it carefully in his pocket.

“The locked room,” he said thoughtfully. “The harpoon. The visitor. There is much to consider.”

As we stepped out of the hut into the warm sunlight, I could not help but contrast the quiet beauty of the countryside with the violence that had taken place within those wooden walls.

Holmes stood for a moment, gazing at the trees.

“Black Peter,” he said softly. “A harsh man meets a harsh end. But the truth of it lies not in anger alone.”

I saw in his expression that the case had already taken hold of his keen mind. The mystery of the sea captain’s death was far from simple, and beneath the obvious violence lay hidden motives yet to be uncovered.

Part 2

Holmes did not leave the hut at once. After a brief glance at the trees outside, he turned back and re-entered the cabin. “We must study this place as if it were a page of writing,” he said quietly. “Every mark has meaning.”

He examined the floorboards closely. Near the table he found faint traces of

footprints. "Large boots," he murmured. "Sea-boots perhaps. But not Carey's. These are newer."

"We found no clear prints outside," Hopkins said. "The ground was hard."

"The visitor was cautious," Holmes replied. "But not perfect."

He then inspected the two glasses on the table. One had been used, the other untouched. Holmes lifted the bottle of rum and smelled it lightly.

"Strong," he said. "Carey drank deeply. The visitor perhaps less so."

"You think the visitor feared him?" I asked.

Holmes gave a small nod. "Carey was known for his temper. A man who drinks and carries weapons is not easy company."

Hopkins showed us the harpoon that had been removed from the wall. It was heavy and sharp, its iron head stained dark.

"It would require strength," Hopkins said again.

Holmes tested the weight thoughtfully. "Yes. But not beyond the power of a strong young man, especially in a moment of fear."

He then turned his attention to the notebook once more. "The initials J.H.N.," he said. "And these figures. They resemble entries of money. Perhaps a record of payments."

"We have searched for a man with those initials," Hopkins said. "There is one young fellow in London—John Hopley Neligan."

Holmes's eyes brightened slightly. "And what is his story?"

Hopkins explained that Neligan was the son of a banker who had disappeared years before under suspicion of dishonesty. The elder Neligan had vanished at sea. Rumor said that he had carried securities with him—valuable papers which were never recovered.

"The son has long believed his father innocent," Hopkins said. "He has sought to clear his name."

Holmes walked slowly toward the door, deep in thought.

"Suppose," he said quietly, "that Peter Carey had knowledge of that disappearance. Suppose he had found something at sea—something of value."

"You think Carey had those missing papers?" I asked.

Holmes looked at me. "It is possible. A sea captain encounters many things. If he found securities lost from a sinking ship, he might keep silent."

Hopkins nodded eagerly. "And Neligan, believing Carey had information, might visit him to question him."

"Yes," Holmes said. "But would he kill him?"

That afternoon Holmes asked that a message be sent to London. By evening a pale young man was brought before us at the inn. His face was thin and anxious. He held his hat nervously in his hands.

"You are John Hopley Neligan?" Holmes asked calmly.

"Yes, sir," the young man replied in a low voice.

"You have been to Forest Row recently?" Holmes continued.

Neligan hesitated. "Yes," he said at last. "I came to ask Captain Carey about my father."

"And you visited his hut?" Holmes asked.

"I did," Neligan admitted. "But I swear I did not kill him."

Holmes's gaze was steady. "Tell us exactly what happened."

Neligan explained that he had learned that Carey once commanded a ship near the time of his father's disappearance. He believed that Carey might have recovered the missing securities. He had therefore sought him out.

"He was violent," Neligan said. "He cursed me and drove me away. But I returned later, hoping to find proof in his papers."

"You entered the hut after his death?" Holmes asked.

"Yes," Neligan replied. "I found the door unfastened. I saw him—" His voice faltered. "I saw him pinned to the wall."

"And the notebook?" Holmes asked quietly.

Neligan looked startled. "It is mine," he admitted. "I must have dropped it in my fright."

Hopkins stepped forward. "You see, Mr. Holmes," he said. "He was there."

Holmes held up a hand.

"Being present is not the same as being guilty," he said calmly.

He turned again to Neligan. "You are not strong enough to drive that harpoon

as it was driven,” he said quietly. “Nor have you the look of a man who drinks rum in company with a sea captain.”

Neligan’s eyes filled with tears. “I only wished to clear my father’s name,” he said.

Holmes nodded slowly.

“Inspector,” he said to Hopkins, “we must look beyond this young man.”

Later that evening Holmes requested to see a list of ships on which Carey had served. Among them was one vessel that had sailed in northern waters near the time of the banker’s disappearance.

“Carey was aboard that ship,” Holmes said thoughtfully. “If he encountered the drifting remains of another vessel, he might have found those securities.”

The next day Holmes visited a sailor’s lodging not far from the village. There he found a large man with rough hands and a heavy beard. The man’s name was Patrick Cairns.

Holmes spoke with him quietly at first. But when Cairns heard mention of the harpoon, his expression changed.

“I was once with Carey,” he admitted. “He was a cruel man.”

Holmes’s voice remained calm. “You met him again recently.”

Cairns’s eyes shifted.

“He had something that did not belong to him,” Holmes continued. “You confronted him.”

There was silence for a long moment. Then Cairns spoke in a low voice.

“He threatened me,” he said. “He reached for a knife. I seized the harpoon. I struck before he could kill me.”

The confession was clear.

“And the locked door?” Hopkins asked later.

“He left by the window,” Holmes said quietly. “Then locked the door from within using a cord through the key. It is an old trick.”

Cairns was arrested and charged. Neligan, though guilty of entering the hut, was freed from suspicion of murder.

As Holmes and I prepared to return to London, I reflected upon the case.

“It was not greed alone,” I said. “It was the meeting of past and present.”

Holmes nodded.

“Carey lived harshly,” he said. “He gathered secrets as he gathered trophies. At last, one of those secrets returned with force.”

The quiet fields of Sussex lay calm beneath the sun as we departed. Yet within that small wooden hut, the violent end of Black Peter had revealed the hidden story of a lost ship, a broken family, and a sailor’s desperate act.

Part 3

Although Patrick Cairns had confessed, Holmes was not satisfied until every detail had been made clear. “A confession may explain an act,” he said as we sat together at the inn, “but it must also agree with the facts. If it does not, then something remains hidden.”

Inspector Hopkins, who had shown great eagerness throughout the case, listened with close attention. He had arrested Cairns at once, yet he wished to be certain that no error had been made.

“Cairns says that he met Carey in the hut,” Hopkins said. “They drank together. Then Carey grew violent and reached for a knife. Cairns seized the harpoon and struck.”

“That agrees with the position of the glasses,” Holmes replied. “One was used, the other barely touched. The visitor did not drink deeply.”

“And the notebook?” I asked.

Holmes nodded. “Dropped by Neligan when he entered after the crime. That explains its presence.”

Hopkins leaned forward. “But why did Cairns return after so many years?” he asked.

Holmes’s face grew thoughtful.

“Because he believed Carey possessed securities taken from the sea,” he said. “Cairns knew that Carey had once recovered a chest from a drifting vessel. He may have believed that the contents were valuable.”

“And they were,” Hopkins said. “We found papers among Carey’s effects that match those lost by Neligan’s father.”

Holmes gave a small nod. “Then the elder Neligan was indeed innocent. His ship must have been wrecked. Carey found the floating box and kept its contents.”

I could not help but feel sympathy for the young Neligan. His long search for proof had nearly led him into ruin. Holmes, however, showed no sign of emotion beyond quiet satisfaction that truth had been uncovered.

“The locked door troubled me at first,” he said. “But when one considers the window and the simple device of a cord through the key, the puzzle fades.”

“You think Cairns prepared that in advance?” I asked.

“No,” Holmes replied. “It was done quickly after the blow. A sailor is used to ropes and knots. He would act by habit.”

Hopkins smiled slightly. “You have once more made simple what seemed strange,” he said.

Holmes returned the smile faintly. “The strange often becomes simple when one removes false paths.”

Before we left Sussex, Holmes visited the hut once more. The walls still bore the mark where the harpoon had struck. The air inside seemed heavy, though the windows stood open.

“Black Peter,” Holmes said softly, as he looked about the small cabin. “A man feared by many. Yet in the end, his past returned to claim him.”

“He was violent,” I said. “But he did not deserve such an end.”

Holmes did not answer at once. At last he said, “Few men deserve violence. Yet when a life is built upon harshness and secrecy, it often ends in the same manner.”

As we rode back toward the station, the countryside appeared calm and unchanged. The fields lay green beneath the late summer sun. It seemed hard to believe that such peace could hide dark deeds.

“Hopkins has done well,” Holmes remarked quietly. “He shows promise. With patience and thought, he may become a capable officer.”

“You guided him closely,” I observed.

Holmes gave a slight shrug. “Experience must be shared if it is to bear fruit.”

he said.

When we reached London once more, I felt that this case had carried a different tone from many others. There had been no deep plot or wide design, no grand criminal mind at work. Instead, there had been old secrets and sudden anger, joined together in a violent moment.

“The sea left its mark upon that hut,” I said.

Holmes nodded. “Men who live long in harsh places carry those places within them. Carey’s cabin was his world. It ended there.”

Thus concluded the adventure of Black Peter. The mystery of the locked hut and the harpoon was resolved. The name of Neligan was cleared. And Holmes, having once more drawn light from confusion, turned his keen mind toward whatever new problem London might next present.

The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

Part 1

It is with some hesitation that I write of the case of Charles Augustus Milverton. Even now, years later, I feel that I should pass lightly over certain parts of that strange affair. My friend Sherlock Holmes himself rarely spoke of it. Yet it showed a side of his character that few have seen, and for that reason I record it.

It was one winter evening in Baker Street when Holmes received a visitor whose name he uttered with unusual dislike. “Charles Augustus Milverton,” he said, as he read the card. “The worst man in London.”

I looked up in surprise. Holmes was not given to strong language.

“Worse than a murderer?” I asked.

“In some ways, yes,” he replied calmly. “A murderer may kill the body. Milverton kills the spirit.”

The man entered soon after. He was large and well dressed, with a round face and small eyes that shone with cold intelligence. His manner was polite, even cheerful. Yet there was something hard in his expression that I disliked at once.

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said smoothly, taking a seat without waiting to be asked. “I believe you have been speaking of me.”

Holmes regarded him steadily. “I have,” he said. “You are known for certain practices.”

Milverton smiled. “I am a collector,” he said lightly. “I deal in letters.”

Holmes’s face remained expressionless.

“Letters of a private nature,” Milverton continued. “Letters which, if published, might cause embarrassment to their writers.”

“Blackmail,” I said sharply.

Milverton turned his small eyes toward me. “I prefer to think of it as business,” he replied calmly.

Holmes leaned back in his chair.

“You have come here because one of your victims has sought my help,” he said.

Milverton’s smile widened. “You are correct. A young lady of high position is to be married soon. Certain letters she wrote in her youth are in my possession. They contain expressions of feeling which might not please her future husband.”

“And you demand payment,” Holmes said quietly.

“A modest sum,” Milverton replied. “Seven thousand pounds.”

I felt my anger rise. “It is disgraceful,” I said.

Milverton shrugged lightly. “If the lady values her future happiness, she will pay.”

Holmes’s eyes grew cold.

“And if she refuses?” he asked.

“Then the letters will be sent to her fiancé,” Milverton said calmly.

There was a long silence. Holmes stood and walked slowly across the room.

“You are a scoundrel,” he said quietly.

Milverton only smiled again.

“You may insult me,” he said, rising. “But you cannot prevent my business. If your client wishes to save herself, she must meet my terms.”

He bowed slightly and left the room.

For some moments after the door closed, Holmes stood motionless. Then he

turned to me.

“Watson,” he said, “there are crimes which the law cannot reach. Yet they are crimes nonetheless.”

“What will you do?” I asked.

Holmes’s expression was firm.

“I shall see Milverton again,” he said. “But not as myself.”

In the days that followed, Holmes made quiet preparations. He told me that he had taken on a new role and had gained access to Milverton’s house in Hampstead under a false name. He spoke of it lightly, yet I saw that he felt deeply about the matter.

“The letters are kept in a safe,” he said. “If they were destroyed, many lives would be spared misery.”

“You mean to break into his house?” I asked.

Holmes looked at me steadily.

“Yes,” he said simply.

I was shocked at first. “But that is illegal,” I said.

Holmes’s gaze did not waver. “So is what he does,” he replied.

I confess that my loyalty overcame my hesitation. “Then I go with you,” I said firmly.

Holmes gave a faint smile. “I knew you would.”

On a dark night soon after, we set out together. The air was cold, and the streets were quiet. Holmes led the way to Milverton’s house, a large building surrounded by a high wall.

We entered the grounds silently. Holmes moved with great care, avoiding the gravel paths and stepping lightly across the grass. He had studied the house well and knew which window to approach.

With skillful hands he opened it without noise. We slipped inside.

The room was dark. Holmes carried a small lantern, which he shielded carefully. He moved toward a heavy safe against the wall.

“This is where he keeps them,” he whispered.

He worked quickly at the lock. I watched with tense interest. At last there was

a soft click.

The safe door opened.

Inside were bundles of letters tied neatly with ribbon. Holmes began to examine them.

“Each bundle a life,” he murmured.

Suddenly we heard a sound in the hallway.

Holmes closed the safe and motioned for silence. Footsteps approached. We had not expected anyone at that hour.

The door opened, and Charles Augustus Milverton entered the room. He carried a candle and appeared calm, almost pleased.

Holmes and I stood hidden in the shadows.

Milverton moved toward the safe. Before he could reach it, another figure entered quietly behind him—a woman dressed in dark clothes, her face partly covered.

She spoke in a low but steady voice.

“Charles Augustus Milverton.”

He turned in surprise.

“You remember me,” she said.

Milverton’s expression changed. I saw fear in his eyes for the first time.

“You ruined my life,” the woman continued. “You shall ruin no more.”

Before either Holmes or I could move, she raised a small pistol and fired.

Milverton fell without a word.

The woman stood still for a moment, then turned and left the room as silently as she had entered.

Holmes did not pursue her.

“She has done what many have wished to do,” he said quietly.

We stood in silence beside the fallen man. The house remained still.

“We must go,” Holmes said at last.

Before leaving, he opened the safe once more. Rapidly and without hesitation, he removed bundle after bundle of letters and fed them into the fire in the grate.

“No more victims,” he murmured.

Within minutes the papers were reduced to ash.

We slipped out of the house as quietly as we had entered.

The next day the newspapers were filled with news of Milverton's death. The unknown woman was never identified.

Holmes spoke little of the case afterward.

"Justice takes many forms," he said once, when I asked him about it.

And so ended the strange and troubling affair of Charles Augustus Milverton, a case in which the law stood aside and private vengeance struck where official justice could not.

The Adventure of the Six Napoleons

Part 1

It was during one of those busy periods in London when crime seemed to take many curious forms that Inspector Lestrade brought to us the matter of the six Napoleons. I remember the afternoon clearly. Holmes and I were seated in our rooms in Baker Street when Lestrade entered with a look of mixed annoyance and interest upon his face.

"Mr. Holmes," he said, taking off his hat, "I have come about something that may appear foolish. Yet it troubles me."

Holmes leaned back in his chair. "The foolish often hides the serious," he replied. "Pray explain."

Lestrade told us that in several places across the city small plaster busts of Napoleon Bonaparte had been smashed. The incidents were strange but at first seemed no more than acts of mischief. In one case a bust had been broken in a shop window. In another, one had been destroyed in a private house.

"There is no robbery," Lestrade said. "Nothing taken. Only the bust smashed."

Holmes's eyes showed mild interest. "And why does this trouble you?"

"Because," Lestrade replied, "last night a man was found murdered outside one of the houses where a bust had been broken."

At this, Holmes straightened slightly.

“Tell us the details,” he said.

Lestrade explained that a journalist named Horace Harker had reported the first incident. A plaster bust of Napoleon, purchased from a local shop, had been smashed in his home. Soon after, another similar bust had been destroyed in a different house. Then, the previous night, a man named Pietro Venucci had been found stabbed outside a residence in Kensington, where yet another bust had been broken.

“The murdered man was Italian,” Lestrade added. “We believe he may have followed the one who broke the bust.”

Holmes steepled his fingers and considered.

“These busts,” he said. “Are they identical?”

“Yes,” Lestrade replied. “All made from the same mould. Sold by a firm in Stepney.”

“And how many were made?” Holmes asked.

“Six in total,” Lestrade said. “Three have been broken. Three remain unaccounted for.”

Holmes rose at once.

“Then we must find the remaining three,” he said calmly.

I could see that what had begun as a minor matter had now taken hold of his attention.

“Why would a man break plaster busts?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly. “That is the question, Watson.”

We visited first the shop where the busts had been sold. The owner told us that they were cheap ornaments, made in batches. He remembered selling them to different customers over recent months.

“Nothing special about them,” he said. “Just plaster.”

Holmes asked where they had been manufactured. We were directed to a workshop in Stepney.

The workshop was small and filled with dust and broken plaster. The owner confirmed that six busts had been cast from one mould. They had been sold

through a dealer.

Holmes moved slowly through the space, examining the tools and materials.

“Nothing unusual here,” he murmured.

Lestrade, meanwhile, had learned more about the murdered Italian. Pietro Venucci was known to associate with certain criminal circles. He had a brother in London.

“It may be revenge,” Lestrade suggested. “Or some quarrel among them.”

Holmes did not answer at once.

That evening we visited the house in Kensington where the murder had occurred. The broken bust lay in pieces upon the floor.

Holmes knelt and examined the fragments carefully.

“The bust was not smashed in anger,” he said quietly. “It was broken with purpose.”

“Purpose?” I repeated.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “The man who broke it examined the pieces.”

He pointed to the plaster dust upon the carpet and to the way certain fragments had been moved aside.

“He searched for something,” Holmes said.

Lestrade looked surprised. “Something hidden inside?” he asked.

Holmes nodded slowly. “That seems likely.”

We returned to Baker Street in thoughtful silence.

“If something was hidden in one of those busts,” I said, “then the man who breaks them is searching for it.”

“Exactly,” Holmes replied.

“But what?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Perhaps,” he said, “something small but valuable.”

The next day Holmes learned the names of the buyers of the remaining three busts. One was in Chiswick, another in Brixton, and the third had been sold but its location was uncertain.

“We must move quickly,” Holmes said. “If the man continues his search, he

will destroy them all.”

We set out first for Chiswick. Holmes warned the owner to guard his bust carefully. That night, however, the house was broken into and the bust smashed.

Holmes arrived early the next morning. He examined the fragments again with deep attention.

“Nothing found,” he murmured.

“Then whatever he seeks is not here,” Lestrade said.

“Or he did not find it,” Holmes replied.

The pattern was clear. The man was determined to break each bust until he found what he sought.

As we left the scene, Holmes spoke quietly.

“Six busts,” he said. “One object hidden within one of them. The murderer Venucci may have known of it.”

“Then the next bust may bring us closer,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “The six Napoleons conceal a single secret. And when that secret is found, the violence will cease.”

The simple plaster figures, once mere ornaments, had become the center of a strange and dangerous hunt.

Part 2

The next address on Holmes’s list was in Brixton. We went there at once, hoping to arrive before the unknown searcher. The house belonged to a quiet family who were surprised to learn that their small plaster bust of Napoleon might bring danger to their door.

Holmes explained only that it was important the bust remain untouched until he had examined it. He asked that it be brought down carefully and placed upon a table before him.

The bust stood about a foot high. It showed the face of Napoleon in calm expression, the features smooth and pale. Holmes walked slowly around it,

studying it from every side. Then he tapped it gently with his knuckles.

“Solid plaster,” he murmured. “Yet one of the six holds something more.”

“Shall we break it?” I asked.

Holmes shook his head.

“Not here,” he said. “If we destroy it and find nothing, we lose our advantage. The man who seeks it must believe it still intact.”

We left the house under warning to keep watch during the night. Holmes placed a constable nearby. Yet our unknown adversary did not appear that evening.

“He has already learned that the Chiswick bust was empty,” Holmes said as we returned to Baker Street. “He will reason that only two remain.”

Lestrade joined us soon after with fresh information. The murdered Italian, Pietro Venucci, had once been connected with a well-known criminal in Italy named Beppo. Beppo had been arrested in London some months earlier for a stabbing, but had escaped from prison not long before the first bust was broken.

Holmes’s eyes brightened.

“Beppo,” he repeated softly. “An Italian criminal, skilled and desperate.”

“And perhaps seeking something hidden,” Lestrade added.

Holmes nodded.

“If Beppo worked in the plaster workshop,” he said, “he might have hidden something within one of the busts while they were being cast.”

Lestrade struck the table lightly with his hand.

“That is it!” he cried. “We learned that one of the workers there was an Italian.”

“And his name?” Holmes asked calmly.

“Beppo,” Lestrade replied.

Holmes leaned back in satisfaction.

“Then the matter becomes clear,” he said. “Beppo stole something small and valuable—something that could be hidden within wet plaster. To escape detection, he placed it inside one of the busts as they were cast. Later, after his escape, he began to search for it.”

“And Venucci?” I asked.

“Perhaps he knew of Beppo’s theft,” Holmes replied. “Or perhaps he followed

him, hoping to seize the prize.”

“And was killed for it,” Lestrade said grimly.

Holmes nodded.

“Now only one bust remains unbroken,” he said. “The last of the six.”

Through careful inquiry, Holmes traced the final bust to a modest house in Reading. Without delay we took the train there, arriving in the afternoon.

The owner, a quiet elderly gentleman, welcomed us politely when Holmes explained the situation. The bust stood upon a shelf in the sitting room, untouched and intact.

Holmes examined it closely.

“We shall take this with us,” he said.

“And break it?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Yes,” he said. “But in privacy.”

We carried the bust back to our rooms in Baker Street. Lestrade joined us. Holmes placed the plaster figure upon a cloth spread upon the table.

For a moment he stood silently, as if considering the small object before him. Then, with a firm movement, he struck it sharply.

The bust broke apart, the plaster falling in white fragments across the cloth.

Holmes bent down at once and sifted through the pieces.

Suddenly he uttered a quiet exclamation.

From among the plaster fragments he drew a small object, round and dark. He held it up to the light.

It was a black pearl.

Lestrade stared.

“The famous pearl of the Borgias!” he cried.

Holmes nodded calmly.

“Stolen years ago from an Italian noblewoman,” he said. “Beppo must have taken it and hidden it within the plaster while working at the workshop.”

I held the pearl in my hand. It was smooth and heavy, of deep color and great beauty.

“And Beppo broke each bust in turn until he found it,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “He did not know which of the six contained the pearl. He followed the sales and destroyed each bust one by one.”

“And killed Venucci in fear that he would take it,” Lestrade added.

Holmes nodded once more.

“The matter is complete,” he said quietly. “The pearl is recovered. The motive for the murders is revealed.”

Lestrade rose with satisfaction.

“You have solved what seemed madness,” he said. “Six broken busts of Napoleon—and behind them a jewel of great price.”

Holmes smiled faintly.

“The world,” he said, “often hides its secrets in small and unexpected places.”

When Lestrade had left with the pearl and his report, Holmes sat back in his chair.

“It was a simple chain,” he said. “A stolen pearl, hidden in plaster. A desperate man seeking it. Violence when another stood in his way.”

I looked at the white dust still scattered upon the cloth.

“The six Napoleons,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“Yes,” he replied. “Six figures of an emperor—and inside one, a treasure worth more than all the rest.”

Thus ended the curious affair of the six Napoleons, in which what seemed at first a series of foolish acts proved to conceal a single and valuable secret.

The Adventure of the Three Students

Part 1

It was during my time with Holmes in Baker Street that a small but curious case came to us from one of the ancient universities of England. Though no blood was shed and no life lost, the matter touched upon honor, trust, and the weakness of

human character. Holmes himself later described it as one of those quiet problems which test not only the mind but also the heart.

We were visited one afternoon by a tall, nervous gentleman whose manner showed both education and deep concern. He introduced himself as Mr. Hilton Soames, a lecturer at St. Luke's College.

"Mr. Holmes," he said, taking a seat at Holmes's invitation, "I come to you in confidence. The matter concerns the fairness of an examination."

Holmes leaned forward slightly.

"Go on," he said calmly.

Soames explained that on the following day an important scholarship examination was to take place. The prize was valuable, and several students were competing for it. That afternoon, Soames had received the printed proof sheets of the examination paper. He had placed them upon his desk in his private sitting room, intending to correct them before they were finalized.

"I left the room for a short time," Soames continued, "and when I returned, I found clear signs that someone had entered and examined the papers."

"What signs?" Holmes asked.

"The papers had been disturbed," Soames replied. "One sheet was slightly moved. On the table I found small fragments of black clay, and on the window seat there were marks as if someone had leaned there."

Holmes's eyes brightened faintly.

"And your room was locked?" he asked.

"The outer door was locked," Soames said. "But the inner door which leads from my bedroom to my sitting room was left unlocked."

"Who has access to that door?" Holmes asked.

"My servant Bannister," Soames replied. "He has a key to the outer door. The students have no keys."

"How many students are in the competition?" Holmes asked.

"Three," Soames said. "All reside in rooms above mine in the same building."

"Describe them," Holmes said quietly.

Soames did so carefully. The first was Mr. Gilchrist, a tall and athletic young

man of good character and strong ability. The second was Mr. Daulat Ras, a quiet and serious student from India. The third was Mr. Miles McLaren, a brilliant but undisciplined young man known for his irregular habits.

“Do you suspect one of them?” Holmes asked.

Soames hesitated.

“I do not wish to suspect,” he said. “Yet the evidence suggests that someone climbed down from the upper floor and entered through the inner door.”

Holmes rose at once.

“Watson,” he said, “we must visit St. Luke’s College.”

That evening we traveled to the university town. The old stone buildings stood silent under the fading light. There was an air of learning and long tradition about the place.

Soames led us to his rooms. They consisted of a sitting room and a bedroom. The examination proofs lay upon the desk as he had left them.

Holmes examined them closely.

“One sheet has been folded back,” he said softly. “And this pencil mark here is recent.”

He then turned his attention to the small black fragments on the table. He picked one up and rolled it between his fingers.

“Clay,” he murmured. “With small grains of sand.”

“We found some also on the bedroom floor,” Soames said.

Holmes nodded and moved into the bedroom. He examined the carpet and the window. Then he returned to the sitting room and studied the window seat.

“The intruder stood here,” he said. “He leaned out to watch the approach.”

“To watch me return,” Soames said faintly.

Holmes nodded.

“Yes. He wished to avoid discovery.”

Bannister, the servant, was then called. He appeared pale and uneasy.

“You left the outer door unlocked?” Holmes asked.

Bannister hesitated.

“I may have done so by mistake,” he said.

Holmes regarded him steadily.

“When Mr. Soames returned and discovered the disturbance, where were you?” Holmes asked.

“I was in the room,” Bannister replied. “I had entered to ask if he needed anything.”

“And you saw nothing unusual?” Holmes asked.

Bannister swallowed.

“No, sir,” he said.

Holmes’s eyes rested upon him a moment longer, then turned away.

“We must speak with the students,” he said.

We visited first Mr. Gilchrist. He was tall and strong, with the look of an athlete. His room was neat, and he greeted us calmly.

Holmes observed his shoes carefully and noted the spiked soles used for jumping practice.

Next we saw Mr. Daulat Ras. He was quiet and reserved, his manner respectful. His room was orderly, and he showed no sign of distress.

Lastly we went to Mr. Miles McLaren. He appeared annoyed at being disturbed and spoke in a sharp tone.

“I know nothing of your examination papers,” he said quickly.

Holmes observed him without comment.

After we had visited all three, we returned to Soames’s rooms.

“The matter is delicate,” Soames said anxiously. “If the guilty student sits for the examination tomorrow, the result will be unfair.”

Holmes stood by the fire in deep thought.

“The black clay,” he murmured. “And the servant’s manner.”

I sensed that the quiet halls of the college concealed a hidden act of weakness, and that Holmes was close to uncovering it.

Part 2

Holmes remained silent for several minutes after we returned to Mr. Soames’s

sitting room. He stood with his back to the fire, his head slightly bent, and his long fingers pressed together. I had learned that when he adopted this posture, the final steps of his reasoning were already forming.

“Mr. Soames,” he said at last, “I must ask one further question. When you discovered the disturbance, where was Bannister standing?”

Soames considered. “He was seated in that chair by the window,” he replied.

Holmes’s eyes moved at once to the chair.

“And did he remain there during our first visit?” he asked.

“Yes,” Soames said. “He seemed faint and asked to sit down.”

Holmes gave a small nod.

“Indeed,” he murmured.

He then knelt and examined once more the small black fragments of clay upon the table and the carpet. He gathered them carefully into a piece of paper.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “do you recall the shoes of Mr. Gilchrist?”

“Yes,” I replied. “They had spikes.”

“For long jumping,” Holmes said. “And where would he practice?”

“On the athletic field,” I answered.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“And what is found there?” he asked.

“Soft ground,” I said. “Clay mixed with sand.”

Holmes rose at once.

“We must confirm it,” he said.

Within a short time we walked across the college grounds to the athletic field. The evening air was cool, and the field lay quiet. Holmes knelt at the edge of the jumping pit and examined the soil closely. He gathered a small portion in his hand and compared it with the fragments he had taken from Soames’s room.

“The same,” he said quietly. “Black clay with sand.”

We returned at once to the college building. Holmes asked that Mr. Gilchrist be sent to Soames’s rooms.

The tall young man entered calmly, though I saw a faint shadow pass over his face when he saw Holmes’s expression.

“Mr. Gilchrist,” Holmes said gently, “you are an athlete of promise. You practice long jumping?”

“Yes,” the young man replied.

“And this afternoon you practiced?” Holmes continued.

Gilchrist hesitated. “Yes,” he said.

Holmes held up the small paper containing the clay.

“You left traces of that practice in Mr. Soames’s sitting room,” he said quietly.

The young man’s face changed at once. His strong figure seemed to shrink.

“I—I did not mean harm,” he said in a low voice.

Soames gave a cry of distress.

“Then it was you?” he said.

Gilchrist bowed his head.

“The outer door was left unlocked,” he said. “I saw the papers upon the desk as I passed. I had returned from practice and still wore my jumping shoes. I could not resist looking. I entered through the bedroom door and copied part of the examination.”

“And when Mr. Soames returned?” Holmes asked calmly.

“I heard his steps,” Gilchrist said. “I hid in the bedroom. Bannister was in the sitting room. He saw me, but he said nothing. He pretended to be faint so that I might escape.”

Holmes nodded.

“Bannister once served your family,” he said.

Gilchrist looked up in surprise.

“Yes,” he said softly. “He was my father’s servant.”

“And he wished to protect you,” Holmes said.

Bannister, who had been summoned and now stood near the door, burst into tears.

“I could not betray him,” he said. “I have known him since he was a child.”

There was silence in the room. Gilchrist’s face was pale, but his voice was steady when he spoke again.

“I am ashamed,” he said. “I intended to use the knowledge to secure the

scholarship. But now I cannot sit for the examination. I shall leave the college at once.”

Soames’s face showed deep sorrow but also relief.

“You must not appear tomorrow,” he said firmly.

Gilchrist straightened his shoulders.

“I will not,” he replied. “I have already received an offer to join the police service in Africa. I shall accept it and begin anew.”

Holmes regarded him with measured kindness.

“You have done wrong,” he said, “but you have confessed without force. That is something.”

Gilchrist bowed his head and left the room.

Bannister wiped his eyes.

“I have failed in my duty,” he said quietly.

Holmes shook his head.

“You acted from loyalty,” he said. “Yet loyalty must not hide wrongdoing.”

When Bannister had gone, Soames turned to Holmes.

“You have saved the honor of the college,” he said gratefully.

Holmes gave a slight shrug.

“The clay told the story,” he said. “The spiked shoes left marks upon the window seat and the table. The height of the student allowed him to look over the door and see the papers within. The servant’s position in the chair hid the view of the bedroom.”

I reflected upon the matter as we left the college grounds later that evening.

“It was not a crime of greed,” I said. “It was a moment of weakness.”

Holmes nodded.

“Many lives turn upon such moments,” he said quietly. “The young man has chosen honesty at last. That may yet guide him well.”

Thus ended the adventure of the three students—a case without violence, yet rich in the quiet drama of temptation and conscience.

The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez

Part 1

It was in the autumn of a quiet year that Inspector Stanley Hopkins once more sought the help of Sherlock Holmes. The case he brought to us concerned murder, yet it was marked by a strange detail so small that most men might have overlooked it. Holmes, however, found in that detail the key to the entire mystery.

We were in Baker Street when Hopkins arrived, pale and eager as usual.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “a gentleman has been murdered in his study. The case seems simple, yet there is one curious feature.”

Holmes leaned forward with calm interest.

“Let us hear it,” he said.

Hopkins explained that the victim was a wealthy man named Willoughby Smith. He had been employed as secretary to Professor Coram, a retired scholar living in a quiet country house in Sussex. The professor was elderly and in poor health.

On the morning of the crime, Smith had been found in the professor’s study, lying upon the floor with a small wound in his neck. He had been stabbed with a thin blade. In his hand he held a pair of gold pince-nez—small eyeglasses with no arms, which rest upon the nose.

“There were no signs of forced entry,” Hopkins continued. “The windows were closed, and the doors were locked.”

Holmes’s eyes grew bright.

“And the pince-nez?” he asked.

“They do not belong to the secretary,” Hopkins said. “Nor to the professor.”

Holmes rose at once.

“Watson,” he said, “we shall go to Sussex.”

Within hours we arrived at the quiet house. It stood surrounded by trees and fields, peaceful and removed from the noise of London. The professor, a pale and thin old man with sharp features, received us in his study. He appeared shaken but calm.

“My poor secretary,” he said weakly. “A faithful young man. I heard a cry and

called for help, but it was too late.”

Holmes examined the room carefully. The body had already been removed, but the mark of blood remained upon the carpet. On a table lay the gold pince-nez.

Holmes lifted them gently and studied them closely.

“Gold frames,” he murmured. “Strong lenses. And see—one lens is cracked.”

“The secretary must have torn them from the murderer,” Hopkins suggested.

Holmes nodded slightly.

“Yes,” he said. “He grasped them at the moment of struggle.”

Holmes then examined the study. Papers were neatly arranged. No drawers had been forced open. Nothing appeared stolen.

“Was anything missing?” Holmes asked the professor.

“Nothing of value,” the old man replied. “I keep no jewels or large sums here.”

Holmes’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“And who else resides in this house?” he asked.

“Only myself and a housekeeper,” the professor answered.

We then spoke with the housekeeper, a large woman with a serious expression. She confirmed that no strangers had been seen near the house. The door had been found locked.

Holmes returned to the pince-nez. He placed them upon the bridge of his own nose and looked through them.

“Strong short sight,” he murmured. “The wearer could not see clearly at distance.”

He examined the nose pads carefully.

“The marks show that they were worn by a woman,” he said quietly.

Hopkins looked surprised.

“A woman?” he asked.

Holmes nodded.

“The bridge is narrow,” he explained. “The nose pads are close together. And note the slight bend of the frames—consistent with delicate features.”

He then pointed to the cracked lens.

“And see this small scratch,” he added. “It suggests that the glasses fell to the

floor and were stepped upon.”

“Then the murderer was a woman who fled,” Hopkins said.

“Most likely,” Holmes replied.

He walked slowly around the room once more, his eyes scanning every detail. Then he paused by the window.

“There are faint marks here,” he said. “A small impression upon the sill.”

He bent down and examined it closely.

“A woman wearing strong perfume,” he murmured.

“Perfume?” I asked.

“Yes,” Holmes said. “A faint scent remains.”

Hopkins shook his head in wonder.

“But how did she enter and leave if the doors were locked?” he asked.

Holmes did not answer at once.

Instead, he turned back toward Professor Coram.

“You heard nothing unusual before the cry?” he asked.

“Nothing,” the professor replied.

Holmes regarded him steadily.

“You did not recognize the glasses?” he asked.

The professor shook his head slowly.

Holmes’s gaze lingered upon him a moment longer.

Later, when we stepped outside, Holmes spoke quietly.

“The key lies not in entry or exit,” he said. “It lies in identity.”

“You believe the woman was known to someone in the house?” I asked.

Holmes nodded.

“And the professor,” he said softly, “knows more than he has told us.”

The quiet countryside seemed unchanged, yet beneath its calm surface a hidden story waited to be uncovered. The small golden pince-nez, resting in Holmes’s hand, had become the thread that would lead us to the truth.

Part 2

Holmes did not leave the grounds at once. Instead, he asked to see the professor's private rooms. Professor Coram agreed, though I noticed a flicker of unease in his eyes.

The old man's bedroom was simple but comfortable. Books were stacked upon a small table, and a heavy curtain hung near the bed. Holmes walked slowly around the room, observing everything in silence.

Suddenly he paused and bent toward the floor.

"Watson," he said quietly, "observe this."

There were faint impressions in the carpet near the bed—marks as if someone had stood there for some time.

"The shape suggests small feet," Holmes murmured.

Hopkins leaned closer.

"A woman's?" he asked.

Holmes nodded.

"And see here," he added, pointing toward a small door at the far end of the room. "This door leads to a second chamber."

The housekeeper confirmed that the small room beyond was seldom used. Holmes entered it at once. The air inside felt close and heavy.

On the floor near the bed he noticed a scrap of paper, partly hidden.

Holmes picked it up and read it silently. Then he placed it in his pocket without comment.

"There has been a visitor here," he said calmly.

Professor Coram, who had followed us slowly, appeared pale.

"What do you mean?" he asked weakly.

Holmes turned toward him with steady eyes.

"I mean," he said quietly, "that the woman who owned these glasses did not flee the house. She remains here."

There was a moment of silence so deep that I could hear my own breathing.

Hopkins stared at Holmes in disbelief.

"Remains?" he repeated.

Holmes walked toward the heavy curtain beside the bed. With a swift

movement, he drew it aside.

Behind it, hidden within a narrow space, stood a thin woman, her face pale and worn, her dark eyes filled with fear.

She swayed slightly, as if exhausted.

Professor Coram gave a faint cry and sank into a chair.

“It is true,” he whispered.

The woman stepped forward slowly.

“I killed him,” she said in a low voice.

Holmes raised a hand gently.

“You shall tell us everything,” he said calmly.

The woman explained that she had once been connected with Professor Coram many years before in another country. There had been political troubles, secret papers, and betrayal. She had believed that Coram had wronged her and caused suffering to her family.

“I came to confront him,” she said. “I wished only to speak.”

She had entered the house secretly and hidden herself in the unused chamber. That morning, she had ventured into the study to retrieve certain documents which she believed Coram possessed. The secretary, Willoughby Smith, had surprised her.

“He tried to stop me,” she said, her voice shaking. “We struggled. I carried a small knife. I did not mean to kill him.”

In the struggle, the pince-nez had fallen and been torn from her face. The secretary had grasped them even as he fell.

“I ran,” she said. “But I could not escape. I returned to hide.”

Professor Coram covered his face with his hands.

“I knew she was here,” he murmured. “She came to me after the struggle. She was weak and ill. I could not give her up.”

Holmes looked at him with calm understanding.

“You locked the doors and told the police nothing,” he said quietly.

Coram nodded slowly.

“I am old,” he said. “My life is nearly over. I wished to spare her.”

Hopkins stepped forward, his face serious.

“The law must take its course,” he said.

The woman lowered her head.

“I am ready,” she whispered.

Holmes spoke gently.

“The act was not planned murder,” he said. “It was fear and desperation.”

The woman swayed again, and I saw that she was indeed very weak. It seemed that illness had already taken hold of her.

As Hopkins made arrangements, Holmes turned to me.

“The glasses told the story,” he said quietly. “A woman with strong short sight. The narrow bridge of the nose. The perfume. And the fact that she could not have fled far without her glasses.”

“And the professor’s manner,” I added.

Holmes nodded.

“He concealed not from guilt of the act, but from pity.”

As we left the quiet house later that day, the autumn light lay soft upon the fields. The golden pince-nez, now resting in Hopkins’s pocket, had revealed a hidden past and a tragic meeting long delayed.

“Small objects,” Holmes said thoughtfully, “often carry the weight of great histories.”

Thus ended the adventure of the golden pince-nez, a case in which a pair of glasses led to the uncovering of long-buried secrets and a fatal moment of fear.

The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter

Part 1

It was during the height of the rugby season that the curious matter of the Missing Three-Quarter came to us. Holmes and I had spent a quiet morning in Baker Street when a telegram arrived requesting his immediate presence in Cambridge. The message spoke of urgency and mentioned a well-known

university team.

Holmes read it with interest.

“A man has vanished,” he said. “And the disappearance threatens the outcome of an important match.”

“A sporting matter?” I asked.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Sport,” he said, “often involves deep feeling and strong motive. We shall see.”

By the afternoon we were traveling to Cambridge. The air was crisp, and the college buildings rose in old stone beside the river. We were met by Mr. Cyril Overton, a large and powerful young man who served as captain of his college rugby team.

His manner was direct and anxious.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “we play against Oxford tomorrow. Our best player, Godfrey Staunton, has disappeared.”

Holmes listened carefully as Overton explained. Staunton was one of the finest three-quarters in England, a player whose speed and strength could decide the match. He had been seen the previous day and had received a telegram shortly before vanishing.

“A telegram?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” Overton replied. “He read it, grew pale, and left at once. He told no one where he was going.”

“Do you have the telegram?” Holmes asked.

“No,” Overton said. “It was taken with him.”

Holmes’s eyes grew thoughtful.

“And you believe foul play?” he asked.

Overton hesitated.

“It is possible,” he said. “There are those who would profit if we lost.”

Holmes nodded.

“Tell us of Staunton,” he said. “His character.”

Overton described him as steady and serious, a man devoted to his studies as well as his sport. There had been no signs of distress before the telegram arrived.

“Did he have any enemies?” Holmes asked.

“None that I know of,” Overton replied.

Holmes then asked to see the place where Staunton had last been observed. We visited his rooms in the college. They were orderly and neat. Nothing appeared disturbed.

Holmes examined the desk and found no letters or notes.

“The key lies in that telegram,” he said quietly.

We then visited the local telegraph office. After some inquiry, Holmes learned that the telegram had been sent from a small village several miles away.

“The sender’s name?” Holmes asked.

The clerk hesitated.

“It was signed ‘R. S.,’” he said.

Holmes exchanged a glance with me.

“R. S.,” he murmured. “Initials that may conceal much.”

We traveled at once to the village from which the telegram had been sent. It was a quiet place with a small inn and a few cottages.

Holmes made careful inquiries and learned that a woman had sent the message.

“Describe her,” he asked.

“Pale and anxious,” the clerk replied. “She seemed in distress.”

Holmes’s expression sharpened.

“Did she appear alone?” he asked.

“Yes,” came the answer.

From further questioning, Holmes learned that the telegram had read simply: “Come at once.”

“Urgent and personal,” Holmes said quietly.

We continued our inquiries until we reached a modest house at the edge of the village. Holmes knocked firmly.

A middle-aged woman opened the door, her face drawn with worry.

“We seek news of Mr. Godfrey Staunton,” Holmes said gently.

The woman hesitated, then stepped aside.

Inside, in a small upstairs room, we found Staunton.

He sat beside a bed where a young woman lay pale and weak. He rose quickly when he saw us, his expression a mixture of relief and concern.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “I meant no harm.”

Holmes regarded him calmly.

“You received a telegram,” he said.

Staunton nodded.

“From my wife,” he replied quietly.

Overton, who had accompanied us, stared in astonishment.

“Your wife?” he exclaimed.

Staunton bowed his head.

“I married secretly,” he said. “She is ill. Very ill. The telegram told me she was near death.”

Holmes looked at the pale woman upon the bed and then back at Staunton.

“You feared that knowledge of your marriage might affect your position?” he asked gently.

Staunton nodded again.

“It might have complicated matters,” he said. “I chose silence.”

Holmes’s face softened slightly.

“You acted from love, not deceit,” he said.

The young woman stirred faintly.

“He has been here all night,” the older woman whispered.

Holmes turned to Overton.

“Your missing three-quarter has not been harmed,” he said. “He chose duty to his wife over sport.”

Overton’s face changed from anger to understanding.

“Then the match—” he began.

Holmes gave a faint smile.

“There are games,” he said quietly, “and there are lives.”

As we left the small house, the winter sun shone weakly across the fields.

“A simple case,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“Yet full of feeling,” he replied.

Thus ended the adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter, a case in which a moment of silence concealed not crime but devotion, and where the urgency of sport yielded to the greater claim of human love.

The Adventure of the Abbey Grange

Part 1

It was on a bitter winter morning that the case of the Abbey Grange came to us. The frost lay thick upon the streets of London when Inspector Stanley Hopkins arrived at Baker Street with a face both excited and troubled. Holmes had just finished his breakfast when the inspector entered in haste.

“Mr. Holmes,” he said, “a most serious crime has been committed in Kent. Sir Eustace Brackenstall has been murdered.”

Holmes rose at once.

“Tell us everything,” he said calmly.

Hopkins explained that Sir Eustace, a wealthy landowner, had been found dead in the dining room of his house, Abbey Grange. He had been struck violently with a poker. His wife, Lady Brackenstall, had been found tied to a chair. She claimed that burglars had entered the house, killed her husband, and escaped with silver.

“Three men,” Hopkins said. “She described them as rough fellows known for such crimes.”

Holmes’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“And what evidence supports this account?” he asked.

“The silver was missing,” Hopkins replied. “The cupboard had been forced. And there were marks of rope upon Lady Brackenstall’s wrists.”

“Rope?” Holmes repeated.

“Yes,” said Hopkins. “She was bound to the chair.”

Holmes turned to me.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “we shall go to Kent.”

By midday we were traveling through the cold countryside toward Abbey Grange. The house stood large and solid among bare trees, its stone walls pale under the winter sky.

We were received by Lady Brackenstall, a tall and striking woman with fair hair and a pale face. Her manner was composed, yet I sensed deep emotion beneath it. Beside her stood her maid, Theresa, who watched us with sharp eyes.

Lady Brackenstall described the events of the night before. She and her husband had retired late. She had remained in the dining room for a short time. Suddenly three men had entered through the window. They had tied her to a chair and demanded the keys to the silver cupboard. When Sir Eustace entered, he had tried to resist and had been struck down.

“They drank wine,” she added. “They laughed. Then they fled.”

Holmes listened without interruption.

“May we see the room?” he asked quietly.

The dining room bore clear signs of disorder. The cupboard door stood open. A decanter lay upon the table, and three glasses stood near it. Sir Eustace’s body had been removed, but a dark stain marked the place where he had fallen.

Holmes examined the window.

“Forced from outside?” he asked.

Hopkins nodded.

“There are marks,” he said.

Holmes bent close to inspect them.

“Interesting,” he murmured.

He then examined the rope which had bound Lady Brackenstall. It lay upon the table.

Holmes lifted it and studied the knots carefully.

“A sailor’s knot,” he said softly.

“Does that matter?” Hopkins asked.

“It may,” Holmes replied.

He next turned his attention to the wine glasses.

“Three glasses,” he said. “Yet see—two contain wine. The third is untouched.”

Hopkins frowned.

“Perhaps the third man did not drink,” he suggested.

Holmes said nothing but continued his examination.

We were then shown the place where Sir Eustace had been struck. The blow had been powerful.

“A violent man,” Hopkins said.

Holmes looked thoughtful.

“Or a man in sudden passion,” he said quietly.

As we walked outside to view the grounds, Holmes paused by the lawn beneath the window.

“Where are the footprints?” he asked.

Hopkins hesitated.

“The ground is hard with frost,” he said.

Holmes bent and examined the surface carefully.

“Yet there should be some trace,” he murmured.

When we returned indoors, Holmes asked to speak privately with Lady Brackenstall. I remained with Hopkins while Holmes questioned her.

After some time, Holmes rejoined us. His expression was grave.

“Inspector,” he said quietly, “I must ask you to consider a different possibility.”

“Different?” Hopkins asked.

Holmes nodded.

“The story of three burglars does not satisfy me.”

Hopkins stared in surprise.

“But the rope—the silver—the forced window—”

Holmes raised a hand gently.

“The knots were tied after the fact,” he said. “And the wine glasses—only two were used. The third was placed for appearance.”

Hopkins looked troubled.

“Then what do you suggest?” he asked.

Holmes glanced toward the window and then back at the rope upon the table.

“I suggest,” he said softly, “that the truth is both simpler and more tragic.”

The cold air outside seemed to press against the windows of Abbey Grange. Beneath the appearance of burglary, Holmes had begun to see another story unfolding—a story of violence not by strangers, but perhaps by those closer to home.

Part 2

Hopkins looked troubled as Holmes spoke. He was young and earnest, and I could see that he had already formed his theory of the crime. To suggest that it might be false disturbed him.

“But Lady Brackenstall’s injuries are real,” he said. “The marks upon her wrists—”

Holmes lifted the rope once more and examined the loops calmly.

“Yes,” he said. “She was tied. But look closely. The knots are placed where she could not have tied them herself. And yet they are not drawn tight enough to have caused deep injury. The rope was put on after the main event.”

“After the murder?” Hopkins asked.

Holmes nodded.

“The blow that killed Sir Eustace was sudden and violent. It was not the act of a thief wishing only to escape. It was the act of a man filled with strong feeling.”

We were then informed that Sir Eustace had been known for harsh temper and heavy drinking. The servants spoke quietly of loud quarrels within the house.

Holmes listened carefully to each account.

“And his treatment of his wife?” he asked.

The servants hesitated, but at last one admitted that Sir Eustace had often behaved cruelly toward Lady Brackenstall.

When we were alone again in the dining room, Holmes spoke softly.

“Consider this,” he said. “If three burglars entered, why would they remain to drink wine? Why would they use only two glasses? Why take silver but leave other valuables?”

Hopkins frowned.

“You think the silver was taken to support the story?” he asked slowly.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “It was removed to create the appearance of robbery.”

“Then who took it?” Hopkins demanded.

Holmes walked toward the window and looked out upon the frosted lawn.

“A man accustomed to climbing,” he said. “A man with knowledge of knots. A man who cares deeply for Lady Brackenstall.”

I felt the direction of his thought.

“A sailor?” I asked.

Holmes nodded.

“The knots are those used at sea. The rope was handled with skill.”

Hopkins’s face showed doubt.

“But what motive?” he asked.

Holmes turned back toward us.

“A husband who drinks and strikes,” he said quietly. “A wife who suffers. A visitor who cannot bear to see her harmed.”

Hopkins stared at him.

“You believe there was a fourth man?” he asked.

“No,” Holmes replied. “I believe there was only one.”

That evening Holmes requested that a message be sent to a certain naval officer who was known to have been seen in the district. The man’s name was Captain Jack Crocker.

The next day Captain Crocker came to Abbey Grange. He was a tall, strong man with honest eyes and a face marked by deep feeling. When he entered the room and saw Lady Brackenstall, his expression softened.

Holmes watched him closely.

“You know this lady well?” he asked calmly.

Crocker did not deny it.

“I have known her since before her marriage,” he said.

“And you visited this house last night?” Holmes continued.

There was silence for a long moment. Then Crocker straightened his shoulders.

“Yes,” he said firmly. “I did.”

Hopkins stepped forward at once.

“Then you—” he began.

Holmes raised his hand.

“Let him speak,” he said quietly.

Crocker’s voice was steady, though full of emotion.

“I found Sir Eustace striking her,” he said. “He was drunk. I could not stand by. He seized a poker. I struck him first.”

“With the same poker?” Holmes asked.

Crocker nodded.

“He fell,” he said. “I did not mean to kill him. But the blow was strong.”

Lady Brackenstall covered her face with her hands.

“It was my fault,” she whispered. “I begged him to leave.”

Crocker continued.

“We feared what would follow,” he said. “So we arranged the scene to appear as robbery. I tied her loosely and took the silver.”

“And the wine?” Holmes asked.

“We placed three glasses,” Crocker said. “But we did not think of the detail.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“And the silver?” he asked.

“Thrown into the pond,” Crocker replied.

Hopkins looked uncertain.

“You admit to killing him,” he said.

Crocker’s eyes were clear.

“I struck in defense,” he said. “He would have killed her.”

Holmes turned to Hopkins.

“Inspector,” he said quietly, “this was not murder in cold blood. It was an act of protection.”

Hopkins hesitated. The law demanded arrest. Yet the story before us was not one of greed or hatred, but of violence answered in sudden passion.

Holmes spoke again, his voice low.

“Sir Eustace was known for cruelty,” he said. “The evidence supports the

captain's account. The blow was delivered face to face. The arrangement of the room confirms their confession."

There was a long silence.

At last Hopkins drew a deep breath.

"I shall report what I have learned," he said slowly. "And leave the matter to higher judgment."

Crocker stood tall, ready to accept whatever fate awaited him.

Holmes looked at him steadily.

"You acted as you believed right," he said. "But such actions carry weight."

As we left Abbey Grange later that day, the winter sun lay pale upon the fields.

"You did not press for his arrest," I said quietly.

Holmes shook his head.

"There is justice," he said, "and there is law. They do not always stand together."

Thus ended the adventure of the Abbey Grange—a case in which violence answered cruelty, and where Holmes, though bound to truth, chose to see also the human heart behind the act.

The Adventure of the Second Stain

Part 1

The case of the Second Stain was one which Sherlock Holmes long refused to make public. It concerned high matters of state and persons whose names were known throughout Europe. Only after many years, when the danger had passed and those most concerned were no longer living, did Holmes permit me to set down the facts. Even now, I must speak with care.

It was late one evening when two gentlemen of great importance arrived together at Baker Street. Their faces showed deep concern. One was a cabinet minister, the other a high official whose position carried heavy responsibility.

Holmes received them with calm courtesy.

"You come about a document," he said quietly, before they had spoken a word.

The minister stared.

“You are correct,” he said. “A document of the utmost importance has disappeared.”

Holmes motioned them to sit.

“Explain the circumstances,” he said.

The official spoke first.

“The paper in question is a letter,” he said. “Its contents are of such a nature that, if made public, they could disturb the peace of Europe.”

Holmes’s expression did not change.

“And it has been stolen?” he asked.

“Not stolen in the usual sense,” the minister replied. “It was kept in a locked dispatch box within my private room. Last night it vanished.”

“Who had access to the room?” Holmes asked.

“Only myself and my wife,” the minister said.

Holmes’s eyes sharpened slightly.

“And your wife?” he asked.

The minister hesitated.

“She denies any knowledge,” he said.

Holmes leaned back thoughtfully.

“And who else knew of the existence of this letter?” he asked.

“Very few,” the official replied. “It was received from a foreign power and had not yet been shown to the cabinet.”

“Then its disappearance cannot be widely known,” Holmes said.

“It is known only to us—and now to you,” the minister said firmly.

Holmes was silent for a moment.

“And what of its value to others?” he asked.

“If it reached certain hands,” the official said gravely, “it could be used to force action from our government.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“Blackmail,” he said quietly.

The minister’s face darkened.

“That is our fear,” he said.

Holmes rose and paced the room.

“We must consider who could profit from such possession,” he said. “Is there any person known for such dealings?”

The official exchanged a glance with the minister.

“There is one man,” he said at last. “Eduardo Lucas.”

Holmes stopped.

“Lucas of Godolphin Street?” he asked.

“Yes,” the official replied. “He is known in certain circles.”

Holmes nodded.

“A clever and dangerous man,” he said.

The minister leaned forward.

“You believe he has the letter?” he asked.

Holmes did not answer at once.

“He has been known to obtain documents of value,” he said carefully. “Has anything occurred recently in his life?”

The official spoke in a low voice.

“He was murdered two nights ago.”

I started at this revelation.

“Murdered?” I repeated.

“In his own house,” the official said. “Found dead in his study.”

Holmes’s eyes gleamed.

“Then we have two connected events,” he said quietly. “The disappearance of the letter—and the death of the man who may have possessed it.”

“Exactly,” the minister said. “And if the letter is in his house, it must be found before others discover it.”

Holmes nodded firmly.

“I must examine the scene,” he said.

The following morning we visited the house in Godolphin Street. It was a tall building, well furnished and quiet. Inspector Lestrade met us there and described the murder.

“Lucas was found stabbed,” he said. “There were signs of struggle. The room was in disorder.”

Holmes entered the study and examined it carefully. The carpet bore a dark stain where the body had lain. A chair was overturned. Papers lay scattered upon the desk.

Holmes moved slowly around the room, his keen eyes missing nothing.

“The murderer sought something,” he murmured.

“You think so?” Lestrade asked.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “The disorder is not mere accident. Drawers have been opened.”

He bent and examined the carpet near the wall.

“Curious,” he said softly.

“What is it?” I asked.

“A slight mark,” Holmes replied. “A second stain.”

He pointed to a faint discoloration on the floor near the wall, partly concealed beneath the edge of the carpet.

“Blood?” Lestrade asked.

Holmes shook his head.

“No. Something else.”

He lifted the edge of the carpet carefully and examined the boards beneath.

“The floor has been disturbed,” he said quietly.

The case of the missing letter had now joined with a murder, and Holmes had found the first small sign that the two events were indeed linked.

Part 2

Holmes remained kneeling beside the lifted carpet, his fingers tracing the edge of one floorboard.

“This has been moved,” he said quietly. “See the fresh mark along the side. The board was raised and replaced.”

Lestrade bent down beside him.

“You think something was hidden beneath?” he asked.

Holmes nodded.

“Yes. And perhaps removed again.”

With care, Holmes lifted the loose board. Beneath it was a small hollow space between the beams. It was empty.

“Too late,” Lestrade said with a sigh.

Holmes did not appear discouraged.

“Not necessarily,” he replied. “Let us consider who may have known of this hiding place.”

Lestrade explained that Lucas had lived alone, though he received many visitors. On the night of the murder, neighbors had heard raised voices. A woman had been seen entering the house earlier that evening.

“A woman?” Holmes asked sharply.

“Yes,” Lestrade said. “Well dressed. She has not been identified.”

Holmes stood slowly.

“Was she seen leaving?” he asked.

“No,” Lestrade replied. “But the back door was found open.”

Holmes began to pace the room.

“A woman visits Lucas. A struggle follows. Lucas is killed. And beneath the carpet, a hiding place once contained something.”

“The letter?” I suggested.

Holmes gave a slight nod.

“It is possible.”

We then visited the minister’s residence. Holmes asked to see the dispatch box from which the letter had vanished. It showed no sign of forced entry.

“You are certain the box was locked?” Holmes asked.

“Quite certain,” the minister replied.

“And no servant had access?” Holmes continued.

“None,” the minister said firmly.

Holmes’s gaze shifted briefly toward the minister’s wife, who sat pale and silent.

“Madam,” he said gently, “did you see the letter after it arrived?”

She hesitated only a moment.

“Yes,” she said softly. “My husband showed it to me.”

“And you left it in the box?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” she replied.

Holmes’s eyes lingered upon her face.

“You understand the gravity of this matter?” he asked quietly.

She nodded.

“Perfectly,” she said.

As we left the house, I sensed Holmes’s mind working rapidly.

“You suspect her?” I asked.

Holmes did not answer directly.

“The letter vanished without force,” he said. “Only two people had access. One of them stands to suffer greatly if the letter becomes known.”

“The minister,” I said.

“Or his wife,” Holmes replied softly.

That evening we received further news. Lestrade had learned that Lucas’s wife, from whom he lived apart, had arrived in London unexpectedly and had visited his house on the night of the murder.

“His wife?” I exclaimed.

Holmes’s eyes brightened.

“Yes,” he said. “That explains the woman visitor.”

“But why would she kill him?” I asked.

“Perhaps she discovered something,” Holmes said. “Or perhaps she sought something.”

The next morning we met Lestrade again at Godolphin Street. He reported that Lucas’s wife had confessed to killing her husband in sudden anger. She claimed that he had been cruel and unfaithful.

“But she denies taking any letter,” Lestrade added.

Holmes returned once more to the study and examined the floor carefully.

“Inspector,” he said quietly, “after the murder, who entered this room?”

“Only the police,” Lestrade replied.

“And before the police?” Holmes pressed.

Lestrade hesitated.

“A servant may have entered briefly,” he said.

Holmes stood upright.

“No,” he said firmly. “There was another.”

He explained that the second faint stain on the floor was not blood but candle wax.

“A person returned to this room after the murder,” he said. “In darkness. With a candle.”

“To recover something hidden beneath the floor,” I said slowly.

Holmes nodded.

“Exactly.”

Later that day Holmes requested a private meeting with the minister and his wife. I was not present at the beginning of that interview, but when Holmes emerged, his expression was calm.

“The letter has been recovered,” he said simply.

I stared at him.

“Recovered? From where?”

Holmes smiled faintly.

“From a place where it had been returned,” he said.

He later explained to me in private what had occurred. The minister’s wife, fearing exposure of a past indiscretion contained within the letter, had secretly removed it from the dispatch box and carried it to Lucas. She intended to recover it through negotiation. Instead, Lucas attempted to use it for his own gain.

On the night of the murder, Lucas’s wife had come upon the scene and killed him in anger. In the confusion, the minister’s wife had hidden the letter beneath the floor and later returned in secret to retrieve it before the police discovered the hiding place.

“And she confessed?” I asked.

“She admitted enough,” Holmes replied quietly. “The letter is back in safe hands. No public scandal will arise.”

“And the minister?” I said.

Holmes gave a slight shrug.

“His reputation remains intact,” he said. “As does the peace of Europe.”

I reflected upon the events as we sat once more in Baker Street.

“A letter,” I said. “A murder. And a hidden stain.”

Holmes nodded thoughtfully.

“Small marks,” he said, “often reveal the largest dangers.”

Thus ended the adventure of the Second Stain—a case in which national honor and private weakness crossed paths, and where a faint trace upon a floorboard led to the preservation of both peace and reputation.