

The Adventure of the Lady on the Embankment

by Lois McMaster Bujold

It was late in an unseasonably cool morning of June, 1903, when I dropped in upon my friend Sherlock Holmes, in our old rooms in Baker Street. I had spent the night in a weary deathwatch at the bedside of a patient who was also an old friend of mine and my wife's. He had been riddled through with cancer. But even the knowledge that he had welcomed death as a release from the lingering agony that even the strongest doses of morphia I dared give him no longer had the power to mitigate, did nothing to decrease the intense depression I felt about his passing. It had been a helpless, hopeless case throughout, and the grey and miserable drizzle that fell that morning seemed to echo and amplify my mood. My meditations upon mortality had reached a particularly grotesque stage when my cab turned down Baker Street from Marylebone Road on its way to my own lodgings in Queen Anne Street, and it was partly to shake them off, and partly to put off a little longer the moment when I must pain Alicia with my unpleasant news, that I yielded to impulse as I passed the old familiar facade to stop up and see my friend.

Billy the page passed me through to find Holmes seated at the remains of a sparse breakfast, smoking his first pipe of the day (composed of the dottle of yesterday's) and studying one of several newspapers scattered about in the usual untidiness. He glanced up at me keenly.

"Fetch some fresh coffee, Billy," were the first words out of his mouth. "Sit down, old man. You look exhausted."

I nodded and sank gratefully into the comfort of the old chair. Holmes maintained an undemanding silence until I had finished my first cup of coffee. We spoke then for a while of old Hastings, whom Holmes had known slightly.

"Have you anything on hand?" I inquired at length, to turn the conversation to some more cheerful topic. I nodded at the paper folded open beside his plate.

"Possibly. Although at first glance it looks like it might be more in your line than mine." He tapped the paper with one long, nervous finger. "The state of your chin tells me you have not seen this morning's paper; have you seen yesterday's? No? You are just in time, if you would be interested; Lestrade rang up a short while ago-the man himself should be by soon. Center column," he handed the paper across. "They're all running much the same version; this one is typical."

The headline read, "Woman Found on Embankment. Possible Suicide Attempt? Police Seek Clues to Identity." The paper bore yesterday's date.

"About two AM this morning an unidentified woman was found by Constable John Harmon as he made his rounds by the Embankment not far from Northumberland Avenue. She was sitting upon the steps by the river, soaking wet, and wrapped in a bedsheet. She appeared to be in an unnatural state of mind, approximating deep shock, and would neither speak nor respond to questions. The constable took her to New Scotland Yard, from which she was later transferred to St. Bartholomew's Hospital. She is described by the police as being 5 feet 8 inches tall, weighing about 9 stone, with long dark blonde hair and grey eyes. She appears to be between 30 and 35 years old. She has an old burn scar upon her left calf, another scar upon her left upper arm, and a fresh cut upon her right wrist. Anyone with a clue to the identity of the woman is asked to contact the police. The conduct of the investigation has been left in the experienced hands of Inspector Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, who is following up the case with his accustomed energy and sagacity."

"Most peculiar," I responded, handing back the paper. "But not very detailed."

"It was a late inclusion, I imagine," said Holmes. "But the paper of today has little more, although they have not quite come round to making remarks about the bafflement of the police yet. There is not quite enough here to tell if the case falls into the category of the exotic or the merely sordid. But if I do not mistake that regulation tread, here is the man himself to tell us all about it."

Inspector Lestrade was ushered in by the boy in buttons. He had a dirty white bundle under his arm and a slightly frustrated look upon his ferret-like features. He greeted us both with that subdued and polite manner he acquired when his cases were not going well.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, I can scarcely recall any case I've ever had that presented less to go on," he remarked in aggrieved tones as he opened his bundle for Holmes's inspection. "Clothing can tell you something about a person; sometimes it can even be traced. I've seen you do some remarkable things with pocket-linings, I know; but this poor lady has neither pocket-linings nor pockets to line."

"This sheet, I take it, was the garment referred to in the papers," said Holmes, taking it up and beginning to examine it closely. "Well, negative evidence can sometimes be suggestive all the same." He carried it over to the window. "It is a rather common article, is it not? Of a size and grade suitable to a hospital cot. You have, I take it, checked out the most obvious possibility, that this unfortunate woman has escaped from some institution?"

"I've had men out since yesterday morning. I believe we've covered every public and private hospital and asylum in town-my Lord, and there are a number of 'em-but none of them seem to be missing a lady of this description."

"These bloodstains-what were the woman's injuries?"

"Not too much-a cut and a scrape or two. She hasn't been beaten, she hasn't been tied up, and the doctor at Bart's tells me she hasn't been assaulted, either."

"What a lot of negatives. What about drugs?"

"That was what sent me off to the hospitals. She has a number of needle marks; she's clearly been a patient somewhere, unless she's been feeding a private addiction, a theory I've been coming around to."

"On one arm or both?"

"Oh, both."

"Then she has been administered her shots by a second party, and your second theory loses some of its attractiveness. You've examined the woman yourself?"

"I've seen her. An uncommon-looking sort, if I do say so. But you may as well try talking with a statue, for all the conversation she's got. So we are left with the evidence; and there isn't any. So we must sit on our hands and wait until someone comes forward to identify her, if anyone does."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," said Holmes. "Perhaps the woman herself has more evidence to offer than you think. Although for once I'm forced to agree that your garment here offers very little scope for deduction."

Lestrade looked grimly pleased at this apparent admission of defeat.

"If we could find what she'd cut herself with, I'd be happier," said he. "For example, to use your sort of reasoning, if it were a kitchen knife, we might be able to say she was some poor housewife driven by her poverty to do the desperate thing; or some poor wench abandoned by her lover if it were, say, a cheap penknife."

Holmes held the sheet up to the light thoughtfully. "To use your sort of reasoning: She has a cut on her wrist and has been in the water; therefore she has tried to slash her wrists and drown herself, eh? It seems redundant somehow." Holmes smiled a bit sourly. "Well, I'll give you an alternative. You will find no knife because there is none, and she has not tried to commit suicide by drowning; in fact, she has not tried to commit suicide at all."

"How do you deduce that from a bedsheet?" asked Lestrade, a little startled, but too cautious to take up his usual stand against my friend's theorizing.

"The woman has been through or came from Camberwell on the night she was found. These clay stains are distinctive, although much diluted by their immersion in the river. I think she swam across the river; and a woman who can swim the Thames is unlikely to regard water as deadly enough to invite a suicide attempt. However, beyond the fact that she has escaped from wherever she came by wrapping this sheet around her right arm and breaking a window, and that she has eaten porridge, any further information we can glean from physical clues must come from Bart's. I would be pleased if you could join us, Watson; I have a suspicion that your medical background may be of some use in this. Just ring for Billy, will you, and we'll get a cab."

Within a short time a four-wheeler had deposited us at the door of the great hospital. The house-officer was just coming out of the lady's hospital room as we turned down the dimly-lit corridor.

"Ah, Mr. Lestrade," he cried upon seeing the inspector. "Have the police found something then?"

"Well, not exactly," returned Lestrade. "I brought these gentlemen along by way of consultation. Dr. Stanley, this is Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and of course Dr. Watson. Dr. Stanley was on duty yesterday morning when the constables brought her around."

Dr. Stanley blinked with interest at the name of my companion. "I have heard of you, of course, Mr. Holmes. A privilege, I'm sure." Dr. Stanley was a young man something under middle height, who peered at the world through thick-lensed, gold-rimmed glasses with an uncertain, flickering smile. He was clearly of the impoverished senior medical student type.

"Has there been any change in her condition?" asked Lestrade. "Yes, indeed," said Dr. Stanley. "That is, I think so. She spoke to the nurses this morning; they managed to get some breakfast into her at last. So she can speak - I had been toying with the idea of complete aphasia, as from a stroke, even though she has no right-sided weakness; that would be a terrible thing in a woman so young."

"What did she say?" asked Lestrade, highly interested. "She would scarcely even look at me yesterday, much less talk."

"Well, not much," admitted Dr. Stanley. "Actually, all she said was 'Thank you.' But at least it was something. Yesterday I was thinking of diagnosing her as an hysterical cataleptic, but it won't wash. She's not hysteric nor cataleptic today, exactly; but she is still withdrawn. She sits and stares past one into space with a profound, um, indifference. She still will not talk to me. Perhaps you may have better luck; it's worth a try, anyway."

He turned to escort us through the door. The plainly furnished little hospital room was lit by a cool grey light through a pair of tall, narrow windows. The patient we had come to see was sitting up against a pile of pillows upon her metal cot, dressed in a hospital gown, crisp white sheets pulled into her lap. She was a most extraordinary-looking woman. A thick, silken mane of lion-colored hair framed a pale face of prominent but very harmonious bone structure. High, white forehead, high, wide cheekbones, and a square jaw were accentuated by a thinness of flesh almost suggestive of undernourishment. Lips of palest coral were surmounted by a strong, straight nose and deep-set, crystal-grey eyes which took no notice of us at first, but seemed fixed upon the foot of the bed in an inward tenseness. She sat quietly but for some movement of her long, strong-looking hands, tracing small circles upon the hem of the sheet with a short, unevenly broken fingernail.

"Hm," muttered Holmes, standing at the foot of the bed and looking down at her. He moved to the right side of the bed and lifted her hands. They were unresisting, but for the first time her eyelids flickered and it seemed to me she focused on my companion.

"We see at once that she is right-handed, literate, and not a menial," he began, in the tone of a professor addressing his class. His acid-stained finger traced a prominent writer's callus upon the lady's right middle digit. "She has handled chemicals extensively. And she is a woman who cares little for social conventions. Can you see these very faint, washed-out stains upon her fingers?" I peered closely, barely able to distinguish the brownish marks he pointed out. "The lady smokes. Cigars, I think. She plays a stringed musical instrument-as a hobby, not professionally-probably a guitar. Unquestionably a guitar. She has not worn rings lately, which suggests she is unmarried, or has been widowed for some time."

"Unquestionably unmarried," put in Dr. Stanley.

"Ah? That is something, at least. Some fingernails broken, some bitten; none filed. I think we may take it that she has been in her trouble for several days at a minimum. But not, you see, more than three or four weeks-that by the age of the puncture marks upon her arms. These scrapes upon her palms date only from her adventures of night before last, however. Gravel. The cut upon her wrist is indeed from broken glass, also from night before last, and is the principal source of the bloodstains found upon the sheet. Let us see what her feet have to tell us."

He began to drop the hands, but suddenly they tightened upon his own. The lady was now staring at him intently, and her own fingers began to trace over his hands. Her brow furrowed slightly as her index finger passed over a sticking plaster upon the back of his hand and began to turn up his left shirt cuff, then let it fall back into place abruptly. Holmes watched her with utmost intentness, head tilted to one side, an amazed half-smile upon his lips. She raised her chin to look him full in the face.

"You are..." she began, and paused, the phrase unfinished. She spoke in a mellow alto so quiet I could scarcely catch her words. She appeared to think better of what she had been about to say, and let her hands fall back into her lap. She leaned back upon her pillows. "Go on," she said to Holmes. Holmes stepped back a pace, a tiny frown between his eyes. "She spoke to you!" cried Dr. Stanley in delight. "Somewhat nonsensically," put in Lestrade. "Her accent," I began, but Holmes held up a warning finger. "We shall return to her accent later."

"But she can speak." Dr. Stanley stepped eagerly up to the bedside to capture one of those long white hands for himself. "Madam. What is your name?"

It seemed to me she gave a tiny shake of her head, but she did not look up. Dr. Stanley gazed at her hopefully for a moment, then drew back with a sigh and a shrug. Holmes in the meanwhile completed a brief examination of the lady's feet.

"The marks here also date from the night before last; none older. She has been accustomed to wearing well-fitting shoes. She has been quite athletic at one time but has led of late a more sedentary, indoor life. This burn scar upon her leg is many years old; it dates from the same period as that scar on her left arm, which, by the way, is undoubtedly a bullet wound."

"But what does it all add up to?" asked Lestrade, more puzzled by this flow of information by the minute.

"Well, both your frenzied housewife and your remorseful castaway vanish, I'm afraid. We are left," he went on more slowly, as if not yet absolutely sure of the points he was enumerating, "with a strong-minded, even somewhat eccentric spinster who has led a very active and unconventional youth, and who until a month ago made a decent living as either a chemist or a chemist's assistant."

The grey eyes of the woman were fixed on the detective with a flame-like intensity, but she retained her masked silence.

"You have solved it!" cried Dr. Stanley, who had been following Holmes's demonstration with close and amazed attention.

"Hardly," responded Holmes dryly, wholly unflattered. "I cannot yet begin to suggest how such a woman could have turned up in her condition on the Thames Embankment at two in the morning. There is something very unlikely..."

I could see something was puzzling my friend very much. He stood with his chin upon his hand a moment without completing his last thought, then returned to the head of the bed. He gently lifted the mass of tawny hair to look at the back of the lady's neck, then began to examine her scalp.

"Too bad you washed her hair; there may have been something suggestive. .. Necessary, I suppose... Hm. Here, what's this? Now what do you make of that, Watson?" Holmes lifted a lock of the lady's hair to point out a small patch about the size of a farthing just above her right occipital area. "Shaved, I believe. Note that small circular scab in the center. Wait, here's another. Identical," he continued, lifting hair above the left occipital.

"It looks like the mark of a hypodermic needle," I volunteered.

Holmes raised an eyebrow. "A most peculiar place for an injection, is it not?"

"Perhaps it was intradermal," I suggested.

Dr. Stanley examined it also. "I didn't spot these yesterday." He looked faintly nonplused. "I've never seen anything like it."

Holmes reexamined the spots closely with his pocket lens. I could tell from the grim set of his features that some uncommonly unpleasant idea had occurred to him.

"I say, Watson," he said, walking over to the window and lowering his voice, by which I understood he wanted a private word with me. I joined him, gazing down into a little courtyard formed by the labyrinthine angles of the old buildings. "I have an odd notion with regard to those spots, but I don't know if it's medically possible." He stared unseeingly down into the little gulf of air. "Suppose that for some reason, let us say to gain control of some

property, someone wished to simulate an incapacitating stroke in a second party. Consider for a moment, Watson, how a frog is prepared for dissection."

"Holmes, what a horrible idea!" I cried, as I caught the drift of his thinking.

A little gesture of his hand warned me to keep my voice down. "The insertion of a needle, a little twist," his index finger twirled suggestively by way of demonstration, "and it would be done. It would leave practically no mark after the tiny spot had had a few days to heal. No trace at all once the scab dropped off and the hair grew back. But-is it possible?"

"I'm not quite sure," I spoke slowly. "It would be a horrible shot in the dark for anyone but a skilled surgeon. The least little slip and it would be murder or some equally unpredictable effect."

"Yes. The hand would have to be very skilled-or very lucky. The first hypothesis gives rather more to go on, although one can't entirely discount the second at this stage of the game. If it were so ..."

"Yes?" I could see the idea was peculiarly appalling to him, though indeed it would be dreadful enough to anyone. It clearly stirred a horror and a pity in him. He shrugged, as though to shake it off.

"I'm not sure it wouldn't be murder in either case. But we are getting rather ahead of our data. There are other possibilities. Electricity, perhaps?"

Stanley was reexamining the spots himself. "Do you suspect some kind of villainy, Mr. Holmes?" he asked anxiously. "If only the lady would speak to us!" He grasped her hands and stared into her eyes in frustration. "Why won't you tell us your name?"

"Because I can't remember it!" she shouted at him in a voice suddenly gone gravelly with anger. Dr. Stanley recoiled. As if frightened by her own outburst she folded back into herself, for all the world like some sea creature retreating into its shell. She buried her face in her hands and hunched unbeautifully.

Dr. Stanley's eyes met mine in wild surmise. "Amnesia!" he breathed. I could see that it cheered him immensely to finally have a diagnosis which he could write down. There is something about being able to put a name to a thing which makes it immeasurably more tractable to certain kinds of minds; I do not except myself.

"Her accent," I began again.

Holmes nodded. "She is either an Englishwoman who has spent a great deal of time in America, or an American who has been long in England. It will become apparent which. Wait."

Holmes pulled a straight chair up beside the bed; the lady in it regarded him with attentive solemnity and, it seemed to me, a certain hopefulness.

"Will you talk with me?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," she said, after a long pause. "You, you have your wits about you. You know things. It has been an evil dream. They," indicating Lestrade and Dr. Stanley with a nod, "kept asking me why I'd tried to kill myself. I could make no sense of them. And they kept asking me my name, and I cannot..." her voice rose, and she showed signs of retreating again.

"What can you remember?" asked Holmes, cutting across the fear expressed in her voice. "Look at me. Be calm. Don't worry for the moment about what you can't remember; concentrate on what you do recall. Begin at the beginning; speak slowly; tell me all the little details. That's better." He sat back as the lady visibly took hold of herself under his encouragement. She sat up straight as if organizing her posture would help her organize her whirling thoughts, and began an extraordinary statement, haltingly at first but becoming clearer and stronger as she went on.

"I woke up in a little room. It was... the day before yesterday, I think. I am not sure."

"Can you describe the room?" asked the detective.

"It was square, about ten feet on a side. There was a brick fireplace, boarded up, with black slate in front of it. The floor was light-colored boards, but it was dirty. There was no rug. The walls were painted green, but it was peeling in several places."

"What was underneath?"

"More paint. The top layer was green, then yellow, then white, then pink. The ceiling was high-three feet beyond my reach. There was a sheet tacked over the window. I was lying on a little narrow bed, made of wood. It had some carving on it of grape leaves. There was a little square table beside the bed, wood, very plain. There was no other furniture."

"How did you feel when you awoke? Did you have a headache, or were you groggy or dry-mouthed?"

"I felt nothing at first. I lay for a long time looking at the ceiling without moving. I felt numb. I felt as if I had become lost in time, as if I had been there forever and would be there forever. I don't know how long I would have lain there, but the door opened and a man came in. He had a small china bowl with food in it, a kind of sweetened gruel. He sat me up in bed and gave me the bowl and a spoon, a wooden spoon. He was strange."

"In what way?"

"Not his appearance. It was ordinary enough. He was a little shorter than I, clean-shaven, bland; maggoty. Brown eyes. I didn't much care about him, but he-he was afraid of me."

"How could you tell?"

"He kept his distance. He would not look me in the face. When I moved suddenly, he flinched. When he had to look me in the face, his eyes, they questioned me. It was then that I began to question myself. When I had eaten the gruel he took the bowl and went away, locking the door behind him. I wanted to get up and look around then, but I began to feel sleepy and dizzy. I fell asleep."

"When I woke again there were two there, the maggoty one and another: tall, older; grey, beak-nosed, with eyes like a hawk, bright and blank and unreadable. They had brought another bowl of gruel. The grey man squatted down by the bed. 'Who are you?' he asked me. I could not answer; I could not think. I lay silent and watched. 'You see,' he said, standing up and addressing the other, 'there's nothing to worry about.' "

"And what did you think of him?" inquired Holmes. "Was he also afraid of you?"

"No. He was merely-careful. He made me feel strange, angry. I wanted to memorize his face, so that if I saw him again..." she broke off abruptly.

"Go on."

She took a breath. "I felt the way one would feel about memorizing the pattern on the back of a poisonous snake. That it would be useful knowledge if you want to know," she went on with sudden decision, "he made me feel like an angry ghost.

"The bird-faced man went away. The other stayed to watch me eat, but I only pretended to eat. It wasn't hard to do. I just stared at him, like this.' She lowered her face, then raised it again abruptly to fix upon me with a stare of icy and fanatic bellicosity. Somehow the expression accentuated her peculiar facial bone structure. My consciousness of the unfeminine squareness of her jaw was intensified, and I noticed for the first time a certain skull-like quality about her features. Her eyes seemed to dilate unblinkingly. The effect was so unnerving and the fixity of her attention upon me so embarrassing that I found myself automatically dropping my eyes and wandering over to the window just to evade that basilisk glare.

"It worked just like that," she went on cheerfully. "I hid the porridge in the bedclothes and he took the bowl and went away."

"How did you know to do that?" asked my friend. He was leaning back in his chair with his fingertips pressed together, eyelids half closed, looking as if he were on the verge of falling asleep; by which familiar signs I knew that the lady's narrative had his utmost attention.

"I don't know how I knew. It was-it was self-evident." There were signs of the return of the lady's frustrated confusion.

"Never mind. Go on," encouraged Holmes. "What did you do next?"

"I looked around the room. It was growing dark. I tore the sheet down from the window and looked out. There was a little yard with a wall around it. I sat for a long time in the dark, trying to think; but my mind would not focus. The window was stuck-the woodwork was painted over many times. I could not move it. The room began to feel stuffy of a sudden. I wanted out. Once I had begun to feel afraid, the feeling grew very quickly. I wrapped the sheet from the bed round my arm and broke the window. Then I hung by the ledge and dropped down."

"You were on the first floor," interjected Holmes.

"No." Holmes's remark broke her concentration momentarily. "No, it was the second."

"I see. Go on."

"I landed on grass. I crouched for a moment, listening, for it seemed to me I had made a dreadful amount of noise. Then all my panic flooded my mind at once. I ran, out the back. I ran and ran, down little alleys, keeping to the dark and shadows. I do not think I could retrace my steps; my mind was all in pieces. Everything around me seemed dirty and strange. I came to a wide river. It seemed to me that there were things behind me in the dark.

I waded in, fell into the cold water and let it carry me away. I felt better while swimming; the water hid me, held me. I floated for a long time, just paddling gently. Then I fetched up against a stone wall. I swam along it until I came to some stone steps. I crawled up on the steps and just sat. I felt cold and dizzy and sick. I wrapped the sheet around me-I don't know how I came still to have it, for I don't remember carrying it with me. I sat for a long time. A man in a uniform came out of the darkness and began to ask me questions. I could not answer him; I did not know the answers. He brought me here."

Her narrative trailed off. She shook her head, an unhappy half-smile upon her lips, and met my companion's eyes in a gaze of most earnest entreaty. "Do you think me mad?" she asked quietly.

Holmes met her gaze unflinchingly. "No," said he.

She studied his face with penetrating concentration, then sat back with a little nod, as if satisfied by what she saw there. "You are a man of your word," she murmured. Her inward look returned, and she fell silent.

"Well, Inspector Lestrade," said Holmes, rising briskly, "that should give you something to go on."

"What?" asked the Inspector in frank bafflement. He had the air of a man who had been promised a treat for breakfast and then presented with a plate of snails; he vaguely saw that he was expected to be grateful, but could not understand why.

"The next step is not obvious to you? Yet you heard what I heard and saw what I saw. Very well, I will make you a free present of it, since you brought me here to ask my advice, and since you have saved me from a morning of boredom. You are looking for a house in Camberwell that has been rented within the last month to one or both of the two men with whose descriptions this lady has just favored us. It is brick, in a run-down condition, stands in its own grounds with a wall around it, and has a broken window upon the first floor in the back. That window, incidentally, proves this lady to be an American in spite of her ambiguous accent; she may be athletic, but she did not drop over thirty feet to the ground; calling the first floor the second is a pure Americanism."

"But Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade, pulling my friend aside and lowering his voice, "how can we trust her testimony? Her state of mind-" he tapped his forehead significantly. "Why, she can't even remember her own name!"

"Ah, yes, her memory," responded Holmes. "There is indeed something very unusual about her memory. Did you notice it, Watson?"

"She's lost it," said I, wondering what in heaven's name he was leading up to now.

"That, too," replied Holmes. "But just lend me that copy of the Times I see peeking from your raincoat pocket, Inspector, and I think I can favor you a remarkable demonstration."

He took the paper from Lestrade and glanced through it briefly, then folded it open. "This is nice and neutral, it will do. Madam," he turned back to the patient, "if I may trouble you one more time. Please read this little paragraph here, to yourself, that's fine. Then give the paper back to me. Good. Now tell me what you read, word for word."

The lady complied readily now with his instructions. She composed her hands in her lap and began to recite as Holmes handed the paper to Lestrade and me and pointed out the paragraph in question, which was a financial report on copra imports.

"Holmes!" I cried in sudden enlightenment when she was but half through. "She has a photographic memory!"

The detective smiled benignly upon me, and gave a little nod of his head, as if to take a bow for the performance.

"But what does that show?" asked Lestrade fadively.

"I have no idea," Holmes admitted cheerfully. "But put it in your bag of facts; it may prove important later."

We prepared to take our leave. Holmes turned back for a last encouraging word to the patient.

"Madam, do not be afraid. There is every hope that with the information we have gained Inspector Lestrade can bring your case to a speedy and happy conclusion. We shall keep in touch."

He was rewarded with the first real smile I had seen on the lady's face. Its wistful quality illuminated and softened a face I had at first found too harsh, bony, and tense to qualify for feminine beauty.

"Thank you," she said. After a silence we left her, eyes turned inward once again, in a pose very like that in which we had first found her.

"A case not without features of interest, Watson," remarked Holmes in the cab as we were driven back to our respective lodgings. "I hope our friend Lestrade is able to do it justice. No doubt I shall hear from him again before it is done. There are some ambiguous points; more than one interpretation is yet admissible." He paused thoughtfully. "Now, the fair sex is your department, as I think I have observed to you before; what did you think of Lestrade's catch?"

"As a woman?" I shrugged. "She was in great mental distress, of course. It is hard to tell."

"You were not wholly taken with her? Unusual."

I searched for the words in which to put my very vague impressions. "It is unfair to judge her in her present condition; yet I confess I could not warm to her unreservedly. It seemed to me that she lacked that sweet spirituality which is the ultimate hallmark of a woman of refinement."

"You found her harsh, in short. I fancy you are right. Refinement is probably not her strong suit. And yet she has a remarkable intelligence for a woman, and a certain physical courage most unusual in her sex."

"You find her attractive?" I asked, surprised at even this guarded encomium from my traditionally misogynistic friend.

"I find her a puzzle. But I'm afraid it may prove one more suited to the talents of an alienist than to a middle-aged criminal detective. I've had clients who had lost their jewels, their husbands, or their fiances; but one who has lost her past is a new experience."

"But you said you did not think her mad."

"She is clearly capable of logical reasoning and a certain subtlety of observation. Amnesia is not necessarily madness in the padded cell and straight-jacket sense."

"Then you find her problem to be medical, not criminal?"

"It is medical, surely; however, we cannot yet eliminate the possibility of some criminal connection to it. Indeed we may not. I shall be quite interested to hear what Lestrade digs up in Camberwell. No, I shan't come in with you, Mrs. Watson is much better equipped than I to minister to your current needs. My apologies for keeping you from your much needed rest for so long."

I got out before my residence, and waved as the cab bore him away. "Let me know how it turns out," I cried.

It was close to midnight as I sat in my study in my home in Queen Anne Street. My wife and the servants had all gone to bed. A long nap in the afternoon had made up for the exhaustion produced by the previous night and morning, but had left me too wakeful to join them. The driest article I could find in the British Medical Journal was showing some prospect of lulling me to sleep, when a ring at the door blasted hopes of an uneventful evening. Midnight calls were invariably patients with emergencies. I was considering the charms of the life of a government clerk as I went in my shirtsleeves to answer the door myself.

"Holmes!" I began. "What brings you out at this - " I broke off in astonishment at the sight of his companion. It was the lady from the Embankment. She was dressed in a well-fitting but very plain raincoat that swept to her ankles, but of the feet beneath it one wore a slipper and the other was bare. Her damp uncombed hair hung loosely about her white, set face, and her eyes were dark and dilated, producing altogether a wild, disheveled effect. She held one arm with the other in an unnatural manner. The sleeve of her coat was stained with blood.

"Holmes, what has happened?" I inquired anxiously as I shut the door behind the bohemian pair, for it seemed

to me that Holmes himself did not present quite so prim an appearance as he had that morning.

"It's attempted murder at the very least, Watson," he said quietly, the tone of his voice wholly at variance with the electrifying message it contained. "Sorry to knock you up at this hour, but I need you in your professional capacity. Is Mrs. Watson abed? Just as well. No need to disturb her yet."

I kept my voice down. "Come into the surgery." I led the way and turned up the gas.

"It's going to take some stitchery," said Holmes, helping the lady off with her coat and seating her at the table. Beneath the coat the lady was dressed in a simple skirt and blouse. In the light I could see that she was trembling and pale. "She has a stab wound in the arm. Hardly in danger of being fatal, but it has bled like the very devil."

The blood-soaked towel wrapped about the arm in question told me he did not exaggerate. I gathered my equipment and a basin, and unwrapped the towel and a soaked handkerchief tied tightly beneath it, to disclose a long, straight cut; the length of the lady's forearm, a mere scratch near the wrist but deep near the elbow. "How in God's name did this happen?" I asked.

Holmes gave me this account as I cleansed and stitched the wound. The lady retained her accustomed silence, except for an occasional sharp intake of breath when the operation became unavoidably painful.

"It was partly my fault. Fool that I was to leave it to that idiot Lestrade!" he began bitterly. "But I should begin at the beginning, after which our lady can tell you her part of the story."

"I had spent the rest of the day after I left you at my cross-indexing. After supper Lestrade dropped by for a pipe, as is his occasional habit. I asked him how his search in Camberwell was progressing."

"'Ah, Mr. Holmes,' said he cheerily. 'What an anticlimax we have had! Not two hours ago the lady's brother turned up to claim her.'

"'What!' I cried, amazed.

"'Yes, there was no doubt about it. After what you had said this morning I was inclined to take a suspicious view of him, but he was able to establish his credentials quite satisfactorily. By the way, one of your deductions at least came home to roost; the fellow was a naturalized American citizen who had been born in England, as was his sister, and he had both their passports to prove his word. His name is Ormond Sacker; his sister's name is Violet. He was undoubtedly one of the two fellows the lady described, though her view of him was so unflattering it was hard to see at first. He was a dark-haired young fellow about 35, my height or a little shorter, with protuberant brown eyes; he dressed quite the gentleman. He had a round, smooth, pale face and a quick way of moving. It turns out the lady had had brain fever in America and had been in rather a bad way. He said they had despaired of her life for weeks. His uncle, who is also their family doctor, this fellow Sacker, and a devoted maid had brought the lady to England in the hope of speeding her recovery, but they'd hardly reached London when she took a turn for the worse. The uncle, by the way, is the one that Violet Sacker called "the bird-faced man." It appears the lady's symptoms take the form of violent delusions in which she does not recognize her family or friends. The poor fellow was quite embarrassed about it. It's a rough thing for a coming young gent to have a madwoman in the family, though he appears quite devoted to her. I'm afraid I pried a bit when I questioned him. "And how did Miss Sacker come by her brain fever?" I asked. I thought he'd crawl under the rug. It turns out there'd been a young man in the picture, wouldn't you know; he'd been rather a loose screw, who'd left abruptly for South America. Well, you know how these women are when they're hitting middle age and not a man in sight. She'd apparently carried on something fierce until she'd finally broke her health, and there you are.'

"It sounded plausible enough, Watson. There was nothing in what he'd said so far that was absolutely contradicted by the physical facts I had observed this morning. But still there were one or two points that bothered me."

"'Why didn't they turn up to claim her earlier?' I put the most obvious of them to him. 'Or contact the police as soon as she was missed?'

"'I wondered that too,' said the inspector. 'Sacker said they'd been out searching for her ever since she'd turned up absent from her bed, and hadn't seen a paper till this morning; the uncle had wanted to call the police, but Sacker had a horror of the publicity that would ensue, and wanted to search himself first. The uncle had convinced him to go to the Yard this morning, when they saw the article in yesterday's paper. The old doctor was quite done in by that time, and sent Sacker around alone to Bart's to collect her.'

"'Well, she flew into one of her agitated fits when she saw her brother. Dr. Stanley had to give her a sedative before the nurses could get her bundled into the clothes he'd brought. Her coat, by the way, had an American label, so that fit. I took his address and sent them off in a hansom.'

"You didn't go with them to see Miss Sacker safely bestowed in Camberwell?" I asked.

"You're out there, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade with a chuckle. "Though it seemed to me that he was more in need of protection than she. She got to be a bit of a wildcat there for a while. But they're not in Camberwell; they're in a rooming house in Hammersmith. You can't expect to be right in every little detail all the time, you know."

By this time I should have had alarm bells going off in my brain; but I was slow, Watson, culpably slow. I think I'm getting too old for this sort of work. Senile softening of the brain. I contented myself with taking down the address and sent him on his way, pleased with having the matter off his hands. I had planned to go see the new production of Faust at Covent Garden tonight, but that voice in the back of my brain sent me off to Hammersmith instead. I thought I'd just drop by and see Miss Sacker, perhaps apologize for my rather cavalier approach to her problems this morning, any excuse would do. When I got to the address this fellow had given Lestrade, it turned out to be a solicitor's office, sandwiched between a pub and a chemist's. You can imagine I felt pretty sick. I rang Lestrade up

from the nearest Exchange-I sincerely hope I got him out of the bath-and fairly screamed at him to get himself and his people down to Camberwell. I've had four clients murdered in my career, as you know, Watson, and I had no desire to repeat the experience. I jumped back into my cab and dashed back to Baker Street, intending to follow on to the Yard. When I got home I found to my profound astonishment Mrs. Hudson in near hysterics, a cabman threatening to call the law, and this lady-dare I call her my client? her name is certainly not Violet Sacker-bleeding in the front hall.

"And now, Madam," he went on, turning earnestly to the lady, "I want you to tell us both your story again. Try to be as coherent and complete as you can this time."

She gave a little nod and began with what was under the circumstances unusual composure, although she still trembled slightly. Her speech was distinctly improved from earlier in the day. Indeed, it improved as her narrative went on, as if practice eased the flow of words.

"That one-he was the same man I remembered from the green room- came for me at the hospital. They said he was my brother. I said he could not be; I was sure of it. I cannot tell you how I knew-I couldn't tell them how. That little doctor said, 'But if you can't remember anything, how do you know he isn't?' Ass," was her dispassionate indictment of Dr. Stanley. "I refused to go with him, but I could not fight them all. They held me down and gave me something that made me dizzy, and put me into the cab with him. I thought then that if I went with him I could find out something about where I came from, so I stopped fighting. We drove for a long time in the rain. I did not recognize anything we passed. He did not speak to me after we left the hospital."

"Did you cross the river at any time?" interjected Holmes.

"No."

"One more thing. Can you describe the cab and the cabman?"

"The cab was just ordinary, not very old. The horse was a little chestnut, about 15 hands or a little more, with a white off hind leg. The cabman was a middle-aged fellow, a little taller than I, neither fat nor thin, with a grey mustache. He had a reddish complexion, a lot of little broken veins in his nose and cheeks. Oh! The cab had a number on it. It was #36974."

"That is all I need," smiled Holmes. "Go on."

"We stopped and got out in a sort of dull residential area. I was still dizzy He took me by the arm and led me two blocks to a little wooded park. There was almost no one about, because of the rain. We went down along a raveled path among the trees to a small ravine. He drew a knife from his coat. I saw it flash out of the corner of my eye in the grey light. I tried to break from his grasp; that's when I was cut in the arm. It caught up under my coat sleeve. I hardly felt it at the time. Actually, it hurt less than-ah-these stitches.

"Sorry," I said. "Just a few more."

"I spun round in front of him and kicked him and ran back up the path." She paused thoughtfully. "He probably should have put the umbrella down first.

"I ran until my head was swimming and I could hardly breathe, out of the park. I walked past a street of houses into a street of shops; everything was closed. Twilight was setting in. I stepped into the doorway of a shop. I found a handkerchief in the pocket of my coat and tied it tight around my arm. I looked around and saw a cab stand down the street. I scarcely knew where to go, but I wanted to get away before that little man found me again. I did not think I could be so lucky a second time. The cabman-I didn't tell him what had happened, but I must have looked strange to him-wanted to call a policeman, but I made him take me to you. I have about had it with the police. That man, Inspector Lestrade..." She shook her head, apparently unable to think of a word for the inspector.

"How did you find my address?" Holmes asked curiously.

"The cabman looked it up at the Post Office Exchange," she replied simply.

I finished applying the dressing to the lady's arm and tied it off neatly. "Very workmanlike," approved Holmes. I pushed aside the mess left by my work and rose to pour us each a well-earned brandy. The lady refused hers with every sign of loathing. Holmes took his and swirled it thoughtfully around the glass.

"Things are distinctly looking up," he said. "Thanks to our rather inept attempted murderer, there are now a vast number of new leads in this rather chaotic tangle. It now becomes a rather intriguing project to see where they will take us."

"You have a theory?" I fished. "Who are those men, and why should they want to murder this lady now, when they had her a prisoner for so long totally at their mercy?"

"Bravo, Watson," said the detective. "You have put your finger upon the primary missing link in our chain: motivation. It is not very difficult now to reconstruct what has happened. We even know why it was done. I am now concerned with finding the why behind the why, as it were."

"Why the murder was attempted?" I asked, feeling very slow.

"That puzzled me at first, I confess. It was not of a piece with the rest. Yet I think I can account for it. I am convinced it hinges upon this lady's remarkable memory. You do not see it? Let me recapitulate what we now know.

"This lady has been kept a prisoner, drugged and helpless, for several weeks by two men, antecedents unknown. The one we have now seen upon our stage, the one who calls himself Ormond Sacker, has not cut a very impressive figure. I believe, however, that among that farrago of lies he told Lestrade he inadvertently let fall one true fact; his companion is a medical man. In truth, I've been waiting for someone with such a background to turn up in the case ever since we observed those spots upon the lady's scalp. This doctor is obviously the leader of the two, the dominant personality, and the engineer of our lady's amnesia. Why?"

"I theorize she was a witness, Watson, of a most unique sort. A witness whose eidetic memory would be unconfused by time, the pressure of suggestion, or the distortions of emotion. A witness whose memory of minute detail would make her a powerful threat to the most subtle plot or activity, one so camouflaged as to pass invisibly before the ordinary observer.

"Her knowledge was a threat to these men; therefore her memory was deliberately destroyed. How, we do not yet know. But they stopped short of murder, or at least the leader did.

"Then one day she manages to throw off her drugged stupor long enough to manufacture an escape. She falls almost at once into the hands of the police. Do they at once take steps to retrieve their captive? You saw how easily it could be done. But no, they wait two days.

"I think there must have been a division in their ranks. The first decision was to let her go. After all, the trouble of keeping her a prisoner must have been a great one. The decision was made by the one whose belief in the permanency of her loss of memory was secure: the doctor. But Sacker, who had feared her from the first, was not convinced. As soon as an opportunity arose to evade his dominant companion, he made a unilateral expedition to eliminate the threat of her testimony once and for all. We know what happened then.

"How criminals are so often their own worst enemies," he went on philosophically. "By Sacker's very attempt to make himself secure, he has drawn all our attention upon them and given us the leads necessary to continue our case. If he had let well enough alone, she would probably have spent some time institutionalized as an unclaimed madwoman whose testimony would be discounted by all around her. The dominant partner, the doctor, had the intelligence to foresee this and the self-control to stand back and let it happen. I predict it is going to be a pleasure doing business with that gentleman, Watson; intelligence has been a quality lamentably lacking in the criminal classes ever since the removal of the late Professor Moriarty.

"Well, I now must be off to question the second cabman, if he hasn't taken to his heels in dismay by now. I gave him a few shillings and sent him around the corner to wait at the nearest pub. Then I must catch up with Lestrade and apprise him of this new turn of events. If you've no objection, I'd like to leave my client here under your medical care. In fact, if no one else turns up with a more legitimate claim to her, I should like you to take her on as a resident patient. If it won't incommode your household too much," he added as a palpable afterthought.

"Um," I said noncommittally. My wife is a good woman, but propriety is very important to her. Sometimes I think it is by way of reaction, not to her American upbringing, which was all that could be wished, but rather to the suspicions of our less cosmopolitan acquaintances that anyone born west of Cornwall must necessarily be half wild Indian. I was not quite certain how she would react to the mysterious history of my proposed patient.

"She will be safer here than at Bart's. No one knows she's here, and there's less chance of unsavory strangers wandering in and out unobserved," my friend went on persuasively in the face of my hesitation. "I'm sure her recovery would be speeded in the heart of a normal home, as opposed to the impersonal confusion of a hospital."

"Would it be?" I asked.

"You underrate your abilities, my dear fellow. Certainly it would. And you could be eyes and ears for me when I was unable to observe the lady myself. It would be a great convenience in the case to have free access to her time.

Although not unaffected by his flattery, I was suspicious of the drift of his thinking. "I shouldn't get too carried away, Holmes," I said a little coldly. "She may be a convenient factor in the case to you, but she is also a woman in great mental distress. Any, ah, experiments you may have in mind would have to be evaluated in that light, as well as whether they would produce data for you."

"I promise you, no experiments without your medical approval. I may take it as fixed, then? There's a good fellow."

I found myself committed, and he took his leave.

With a sigh I prepared to go rouse the housemaid to make up the spare bedroom and look after the personal needs of what was now my resident patient. The lady watched my face gravely, with misgiving.

"Will I discommode your household, Doctor?" she asked abruptly. "Not at all," I answered immediately, in hearty reassurance.

"You are a gentleman, I perceive." She smiled a dry, sad smile and followed me without further comment.

The next morning found her improved still more in her speech and bearing, but still without any return of memory beyond the past three days. The housemaid served her breakfast in her room. Later in the morning I took the opportunity to conduct a more thorough neurological examination upon her. The results gave me food for thought. I found her reflexes and perceptions unimpaired. She could read with understanding and write, after some initial hesitation, without difficulty. Her understanding of mathematics was unhesitant and surprisingly good, from simple arithmetic through elementary calculus, but she could not remember how she had learned it. I became increasingly convinced that she had not suffered organic brain damage at all, and that the cause of her amnesia must be searched for among purely psychological factors. When not forced to engage in necessary or requested activities, she returned to her earlier quiet and withdrawn mode, not speaking unless spoken to directly.

In the course of the morning as I encountered, not for the first time, some conversational awkwardness in addressing a lady with no name, and as she objected to the appellation of Violet Sacker, I elected to christen her "Miss Smith." "Miss Smith?" her attention riveted upon the name in sudden concentration. "Miss Smith..." she repeated

slowly.

"Could it be that I have hit upon your real name by accident?" I cried in astonishment.

She shook her head with a puzzled frown. "No, I don't think so," she said. "But it must be very close. Smith. Smith."

"Smithson?" I suggested. "Smithfield? Smithaven?" She fairly hissed with frustration in her hopeless effort to remember. "I don't know," she shrugged at last in defeat.

On impulse I rattled off perhaps two or three dozen women's first names, but none produced a similar feeling of familiarity, so Miss Smith she became. I found the puzzle of her identity intruding continually upon my thoughts as I made my professional rounds that afternoon. If indeed her loss of memory was hysteric and not organic in origin, then the possibility of inducing its return became feasible. The vague feeling of recognition and non-recognition to which she admitted suggested the hope that it might not be buried so very far below the surface after all. Might not a familiar stimulus bring some image glimmering up through the deep chill water in which it had been drowned? The idea was an exciting one. The only problem lay in guessing what might be a familiar stimulus to her. I thought back over what Holmes had said during our first meeting with her, which now seemed much longer ago than yesterday morning. On a sudden bright impulse I stopped in at a pawnshop on my way home and made a purchase.

Because she seemed so improved, and also to continue my observations, I had Miss Smith come down and attend supper with my wife and myself. It was not a great success, for my wife was rather nervous of her and so unable to help ease her out of her withdrawn silence, but nonetheless it produced a few new pieces of data. Her table manners were ladylike enough, suggesting that in spite of my impression of a certain roughness about her, she was not from the lower social classes. She held her knife and fork in the American manner, confirming Holmes's hypothesis of a principally American origin. She also continued to refuse wine or spirits in any form.

After dinner we withdrew to the drawing room.

"Do you play cards, Miss Smith?" inquired my wife after the initial bustle of getting settled had resolved into a silence whose length threatened to become uncomfortable.

"I don't know," replied my patient with a frown.

"Well, there's one way to find out," I said cheerily, cutting across the slight embarrassment I could see rising in my wife's cheeks at the feeling that she had committed a faux pas. I seated the ladies at the little table and dug out a card deck from the secretary desk. "If you can't remember a game, we'll teach you one," I said, handing her the deck. "See if something comes back to you."

She took the cards and held them in her hands a moment, as if weighing them. Then she cut them and began to shuffle. In spite of a certain stiffness from her injury, they whirred, blurred in her hands. A sudden grin passed over her face, like a patch of sunlight over a distant hillside on a cloudy day.

"I don't remember a game, but I remember some card tricks." She eyed my wife a moment as if sizing her up. "Place your hands upon the table," she commanded Alicia, "and I will show you the even-odd trick."

I nodded reassuringly at Alicia's questioning glance, and she placed her palms down upon the table.

"Now, pick a small, even number," my patient continued. "Two?"

"Fine. Now I will place two cards between each of your fingers. An even number, you see, between each finger—we count the thumb as a finger-of each hand. But between the last two fingers we place an odd card, one card. Now," she went on with easy, cheerful assurance, "I shall take each pair of cards from between your fingers and put them into two even piles. An even number of cards divided evenly into even piles. Now take the last card, the odd card that is left in your hand, and make one of the even piles odd."

My wife complied with a polite, bewildered smile. I suddenly realized that my nearly two decades of climbing the seventeen steps to 221B Baker Street had not been entirely profitless for my mental faculties.

"You agree that this pile upon which you placed the last card is now odd? Now watch closely as I use my magic powers to switch the piles." She waved her hands gently and totally without effect about a foot over the two piles of cards.

"Now which pile is odd? Don't let me stampede you into anything."

Alicia frowned at her mistrustfully, then after a moment tapped the pile upon which she had placed the last card.

"Are you sure? Count them."

She counted them twice, and of course found eight cards in her "odd" pile and seven in her "even."

"How did you do that?" Alicia wailed, as I choked back a chuckle. "Ah, it's all in the mind, you know," said Miss Smith sunnily. Suddenly she frowned, looked down, and pressed her hands to her eyes.

"What is the matter?" I asked, instantly attentive.

"Nothing," she said, her frown belying her words. "Except... I just remembered where I learned that trick."

"Tell me about it," I said with studied casualness.

"I remember a man," she began in a low voice. "He was a big, red-faced, stringy-necked fellow with a great thick curling mustache. He's dressed in dungarees, long underwear, and a blue flannel vest. He chews tobacco, has bad teeth, needs a bath—you wouldn't want him in your Sunday school. He plays cards like a magician, knows a hundred ways to cheat. He has a crude, physical sense of humor. In a lot of ways he's not a very nice person, but he's not a coward and he stands by his friends. He was a friend to me."

"Can you remember his name?" "Crazy... Callaghan." "When did you know him?"

"I don't know. I just have this image of him in my mind, sitting at a cheap pine table with his feet up, laughing, saying, 'It's all in the mind, boy, all in the mind.' Where, when...I cannot say. He's American; it must have been in America."

I pressed her to go on, but apparently the bright and startling vision of her somewhat barbaric acquaintance brought nothing else in its train. I offered to start a card game, but she pushed the deck away sadly. "He taught me cards. I think he is dead now," she explained her lack of enthusiasm.

I took the opportunity to excuse myself, and returned shortly, bearing the package I had purchased that afternoon.

"Try this out," I suggested, handing it to her. Her mouth formed a soundless "O" of surprise as she opened it to reveal an inexpensive guitar. She held it a moment, strummed it, then began to tune it by harmonics.

"Oh, this is better," whispered Alicia to me, getting interested in spite of herself in the process of fishing for memories in my patient.

Miss Smith played a few scales, then began to play and sing in an untrained but pleasant alto.

"I am a roving gambler, I've gambled all around, Whenever I meet with a deck of cards I lay my money down. I've gambled down in Washington, gambled over in Spain, I'm on my way to Georgia to knock down my last game. Knock down my last game, knock down my last game."

Her playing was good, clear and rhythmic, although short of virtuosity. But, like the mathematics, the music trailed no personal memory in its wake, although her accent became pronouncedly more Americanized while singing. She then proceeded (I fear deliberately) to scandalize my wife with a version of "St. James Infirmary," but to my even greater astonishment made up for it by following with a sweet classical study by Carulli.

As we adjourned for bed, I found myself wishing Holmes had been there. I felt I had uncovered unexpected new facets of my patient's personality, but relate them by a chain of reasoning to the central mystery I could not. For that matter, where was Holmes?

That question was answered the next morning when the man himself appeared on my doorstep with a package under his arm. I welcomed him into my study and questioned him anxiously about his previous day's activities. He sat back with a grim, unpleased smile and lit his pipe.

"One would think, Watson," he said, "that a pair of individuals willing to go to such great and bizarre lengths to conceal their activities and evade the attentions of the police must have something rather remarkable to hide. Aside from that obvious deduction, I am no closer to knowing what than I was two days ago. By the way, we, or rather I should say, Inspector Lestrade found the house in Camberwell. Empty, of course. I spent yesterday morning chasing down cabmen while Lestrade and his merry men made the rounds of house agents. I had hoped to take a shortcut and beat him to it, but was foiled by my quarry Sacker's predilection for changing cabs. I did find the cabman who had driven Sacker and - Miss Smith, you say? it will do - from Bart's to Willesden, and had a look at the park she described. It confirmed her story in every particular, but as I had never doubted it, it did not advance me much. Although at least it will make courtroom testimony, if the case ever gets that far. I also found the cabman who had driven Sacker to Bart's, but he had picked up his fare at Victoria.

"At that point I got word from Lestrade of his success in Camberwell, and hurried down to have a look. The birds must have flown the nest within a few hours of Sacker's return night before last. Their departure was hurried but thorough, not so much as a scrap of writing or a dirty sock left anywhere. Someone in that partnership has his wits about him. But the Yard now has their fingerprints and a description out, and a warrant for attempted murder on Sacker, not to mention kidnapping and the forgery of passports. I'll wager Sacker's companion was ready to murder Sacker himself when he found out what he'd done. We also obtained testimony, such as it is, from the maid - not a devoted American, by the way, but a Camberwell charwoman who came in half-days to cook, clean, and shop. She had never seen the prisoner upstairs, who had been described to her as Sacker's mad younger brother, but she describes the doctor, who was going under the name of Aloysius Garnett, as always brewing up medicines for the poor lad upon his chemical apparatus. They must have been interesting, those medicines!

"Following the trail backwards through the passports, the Yard discovered that our trio had arrived in London a little less than three weeks ago from Charleston, South Carolina. They had sailed aboard the American Lines steamship DeWitt Hargrove, where they had passed their prisoner along under the brain fever story. Lestrade wired the Charleston police and port authorities. Their reply was received early this morning. They have nothing- nothing-upon Garnett and Sacker, either by name (not surprising, they are certainly pseudonyms) or by description, but promise to pass the inquiries along on their end.

"Leaving the official police with their larger resources to follow up the two ends of the tangle in their hands, I went home, sat down, and had a smoke. The results have brought me here. I am increasingly convinced, Watson, that we have the key to the puzzle in the person of Miss Smith. Her mind may be half destroyed, but surely there must be a clue or two left in the other half for a sufficiently alert mind to follow up."

"Ah, yes. About her mind, Holmes," I said. "I conducted a pretty thorough examination of her yesterday. I'm afraid your pithing idea is a frog that won't jump. She doesn't have organic brain damage to amount to half a thimbleful, I'll swear it. I am convinced her amnesia is hysterical in origin."

"You have no idea how delighted I would be to give it up," replied Holmes. "Expand upon your theory, then, Doctor."

I recapitulated in detail the events of yesterday, and my attempts to stimulate the lady's memory.

"How great minds do think alike," Holmes smiled, and laid his package upon my desk. "I was just going to ask you to release her to me this morning to come along to Baker Street. I have the greatest curiosity to see what she might do with the chemical corner. I have a theory about her connection with the unsavory Dr. Garnett that merits testing."

"Will the police be able to capture Garnett and Sacker, do you think?" I asked. "Their descriptions are surely distinctive enough."

"Only as long as they are traveling together. If they are smart, they will split up as soon as possible. Individually, each of them looks like a hundred other men."

Just then we were interrupted when the door was flung open without a knock by Miss Smith herself. She had a book from my library in her hand, and her eyes blazed with excitement.

"Doctor. Mr. Holmes. I've found my name," she said breathlessly. "I knew it when I saw it written."

I recognized the book as a pocket Shakespeare.

"It's Cordelia," she went on. "Cordelia. Cord."

"Cordelia Smith?" I said.

She fairly danced from one foot to another. "Almost. Almost!"

"Congratulations," said Holmes quietly, opening his package. "Have a cigar." To my surprise the package contained, in addition to some very fine and extremely expensive thin Dutch cheroots, an old-fashioned American army revolver.

"Why on earth did you bring that?" I asked, pointing to the gun. Holmes returned his attention to me from Miss Smith, whose peculiar method of lighting her cigar (it involved, among other things, striking the match on her thumbnail) he had been observing closely.

"For the same reason, my dear fellow, that you brought home that guitar yesterday. I hope to jog her memory with it."

Miss Smith blew smoke out her nostrils and smiled at him with gratitude and the liveliest interest. In spite of my efforts at nonchalance, my reaction to the unaesthetic sight of a woman smoking cigars in my study must have shown in my face. "I fear I shock the good doctor," she remarked. She did not sound worried about the prospect. "But not you, Mr. Holmes?"

"I deduced it; I expected it," shrugged the detective. "But pray turn your attention to the revolver."

She put down her smoke and picked up the gun pensively, then expertly checked the empty chambers. She turned to raise her arm and aim at the wall, squinting to sight down the barrel. "Bang," she said, her finger squeezing the trigger and the hammer clicking. She lowered the gun and shook her head.

"I must have handled guns before. It seems familiar in a distant sort of way. But where? When?" The inward frown returned.

"Perhaps if you actually fired it?" my friend suggested.

"Holmes," I remonstrated cautiously, "this is not Baker Street."

"Set your fears at rest, Doctor, I am not suggesting indoor revolver practice. An absorbent target set up in your back garden would do nicely."

A few minutes later found us arranging boards against the garden wall. The rains and fogs of the past few days had been swept away by a new wind in the night, and replaced with a fresh sunshine which created a welcome, if humid, warmth. By placing our makeshift target in the far corner and taking up our stand diagonally opposite, a respectable firing distance was achieved.

Holmes drew a packet of revolver bullets from his pocket and handed it to Miss Smith. She loaded with the due precautions to safety she had observed before, then stood staring down at the ground for a few moments. She turned in abrupt decision, raised the revolver, and fired six shots one after the other into the foot-wide circle Holmes had drawn upon the board. An extraordinary change came over her face as she fired. Her eyes narrowed, her chin came up, her mouth compressed itself into a thin white line, her nostrils dilated. As suddenly as she had begun, she stopped, dropped the gun, and turned away from us, hunched and tense. Holmes raised his eyebrows at me by way of comment and went to her, placing his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Miss Smith. Cordelia. What did you remember just now?"

She shook her head without looking at him. "Nothing," she whispered, her hands twisting in the fabric of her skirt.

"Come, now. You are a worse liar than Watson." She looked at him sideways. "It was just a bad dream. That's all." "Are you trying to convince me or yourself?" asked Holmes quietly. She snorted a short, unhappy laugh. "A little of both, I guess." "You are shaking. Come, sit down upon this bench in the sunlight, and try to believe we are your friends. Can you believe that?"

She shrugged helplessly. "Maybe. Maybe I do not wish to lose my friends."

"Ah, I assure you, we are inured to shock," Holmes said. She glanced in my direction. "Well, perhaps not wholly," admitted my friend in soothing tones. "But the good Dr. Watson, as I have reason to know, does not always require his friends to meet his approval before giving them his loyalty."

"Yes," she agreed in a small voice. "You may be right. If he were my friend, I should not fear for my back, no matter how ambiguous..." She broke off, digging into the dirt with the toe of her shoe, as if to bury her confusion. "I don't want to remember any more. Let's go in."

"Let me help you," said Holmes. Then, after a silence, "Whom do you remember shooting?"

She gazed at him unhappily, as if to read his mood.

"A man," she replied at last, unwillingly. "A murderer."

"An American? Was it a long time ago?"

She nodded.

"Whom had he murdered?"

"I can't remember. I really can't."

"Did he die when you shot him?"

"He must have. I put six bullets through his chest and head."

"Was he shooting at you at the time?"

"Yes. Yes, at me and at someone else. I can't remember who."

"Someone important to you?"

"Yes." She turned her face away. It had gone stony.

"That's enough for now," my friend reassured her. "I would not distress you for random amusement. But your memory, you know, is still buried in your brain. Not lost."

"Can we not let the dead stay buried?" she murmured, only half to herself. "Exhumation is such a grisly business."

Holmes studied her profile thoughtfully a moment.

"You know, I too once murdered a man," he remarked. She turned her face to him. "I threw him into a chasm, bodily. He screamed all the way down. I assure you, it is never far from my thoughts."

She gave a little nod. "You understand, then. I was not sure. Was he a murderer too?"

"Yes, among other things."

At this point, I had to go assist the maid to disperse from my front door the neighbors, police constable, butcher's boy, and neighbors' servants who had gathered there in response to the shots fired a short time back in my garden on a respectable London morning. I returned to find Holmes assisting a somewhat more composed Miss Smith into her coat.

"With your permission, Watson, we shall be off to Baker Street. Do you wish to come along?"

"Yes, but I have professional demands this morning that preclude it." I eyed him with misgiving. "You will be careful, won't you, Holmes?"

"My dear fellow, we're only going to run some chemical tests," he reassured me cheerfully. "I shall bring your patient back safe and sound before dinner. Or send you a note," he added as an afterthought, as he shepherd his charge out my door.

I passed by the Baker Street rooms quite late that warm afternoon upon my way home from an unexpected call, and noticing the windows open, suggesting their tenant was in residence, I stopped up for a word with Holmes. The familiar door at the top of the stairs stood propped open, and the slight cross-ventilation so provided served to move the reeking clouds within, compounded of equal parts of tobacco smoke and chemical fumes, gently out the windows, thus creating an atmosphere within only slightly too poisonous for human habitation. To my surprise I found that Holmes was not the only inhabitant; my erstwhile resident patient was sitting in the chemical corner, sleeves rolled up and hair, which had started the day clipped in a kind of wad on the back of her head, escaping to drift in damp untidy strands about her face. Indeed, she looked quite at home amongst the clutter, which seemed worse than usual due not only to the chemical debris but also to the large number of reference books pulled out of the shelves and scattered around in random disarray. She sat smoking and sipping tea, perfectly oblivious to the mess, in the center of which sat Holmes himself with his clay pipe, cross-legged upon the floor, leafing through one of his commonplace books.

"Ah, Watson, come in," he invited, looking up at the sound of my step. "We are having a very productive afternoon."

"And evening, too," I observed. "It's past seven."

"That late? So it is."

"So what has the afternoon produced?" I enquired, settling into my old chair and lighting my own pipe by way of olfactory self-defense against the acrid fog.

"Two cables, one to Boston and one to New York. Miss Smith has almost certainly obtained her scientific education, and probably a bachelor's degree in chemistry, from Tufts University in Boston. Her theory is fair, although it is not her strong point. It is her bench work that is outstanding; she has a butterfly's touch with a burette; you should see it, Watson. We have pulled up a number of memories from her college days in the course of a few little titrations; apparently it was a pleasant period in her life."

"Thus the cable to Boston," I deduced. "You hope to find someone who knows her history."

"Just so."

"And the cable to New York?"

"That is a longer shot. It has to do with her connection with Garnett. She has almost certainly made her living as a chemist; I think she was Garnett's employee. If Garnett's livelihood was in some esoteric branch of medical pharmaceuticals (and I have a notion as to just how esoteric), a narrow specialty, and yet had enough business to force

him to hire an assistant, it suggests he was operating in a largish population center, and New York is America's commercial capital. It is also its capital of crime. I have a friend in the New York Police Department who will give my inquiry the follow-up it deserves.

"But how, in your theory, did she go from being Garnett's employee to being his prisoner?"

"That I shall allow you to reason out for yourself. Your brain can use the exercise. The other item up for consideration has to do with the story told to Lestrade by our friend Sacker. I smoked a couple of pipes thinking it over, and eventually noticed a curious thing about it. A rather large number of his lies were sprung from truths. Of course, if you're trying to tell a story that is likely to be checked, the closer you parallel actual events the better, but still it was an indication of how his mind worked. Now, in his little play we find these creations: persons born in England who have emigrated; a 'loose screw' who went to South America; a person who, falling in love late in life, allows emotion to overcome reason; and a doctor. Sacker and Garnett are both certainly English, and Garnett is certainly a doctor, apparently between 55 and 60 years old by his description. What about the South American connection?"

"It would be too much to expect this old index to contain an account of every Englishman who has left under a cloud for South America in the last 25 years; but a doctor, particularly that rarity, a medical criminal, might be expected to stand out in the crowd. Remember Dr. Grimesby Roylott? Thus."

He handed me the old scrapbook, and pointed out a pair of yellowed clippings.

The first was an account, dated 1881, of a case that had come before the London Assizes alleging a fraudulent collusion between a doctor, one Lewis Brookman, and the heir-at-law of one of his patients. The patient had been an aging textiles entrepreneur, and the issue a false certification of insanity, the purpose being to gain control of the old businessman's estate. It was hinted that the doctor's role went beyond a mere faked document, to the actual creation of symptoms of dementia in his patient by means yet unproved.

The second clipping, a follow-up of the first, reported the case dropped from court due to lack of evidence and suspicions of the validity of the testimony of two of the witnesses. The defendant Dr. Brookman was reported to be considering leaving his ruined London practice for a post at the Hospital San Felice in Rio de Janeiro.

"I do not recall the case," I remarked, handing the book back to its owner.

"Not surprising. I had nothing to do with it professionally at the time, although I followed it in the papers. The case was thrown out upon technicalities, and a lot of disagreements by the medical authorities called to testify. But the personality of the suave Dr. Brookman interested me. He had had a brilliant university career, and had at one time considered specialization in neurological problems. His career would seem to have been well launched, but evidently his expenditures outran his income to the tune of something over-well over-four figures. Why, was not explained. I wish I had some note upon his vices."

"You think this Brookman, then, is Garnett?"

"I think it is an hypothesis worth testing. There is a suggestive similarity in their methods, and the ages fit."

There was a ring at the door downstairs, and the sound of voices carried upward through the hall.

"Lestrade," said Holmes, levering himself up off the floor. "Now what has he found, I wonder."

The familiar features of the inspector appeared around the doorjamb, looking for all the world like a stoat peeking out of its hole.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes," he said, entering upon my friend's invitation. He had a small suitcase in his hand. "And you too, Dr. Watson. Oh." This last as he caught sight of the occupant of the chemical corner. I could swear a slight flush rose over his features. "Uh, good evening to you too, Ma'am."

Miss Smith smiled a cool, ironic smile, and inclined her head in a kind of regal acknowledgment of his greeting. I could see his embarrassment aroused a little devilishness in her eyes.

"You are having quite a convention, I see," he went on, taking the chair that his host indicated. "No need for you to get up, Dr. Watson. What I came to tell Mr. Holmes properly concerns you too, since I understand this lady is now your patient."

"Have the official police captured their quarry, then?" I asked.

"Well, yes and no," Lestrade replied, rubbing a finger over his cheekbone.

"Meaning they have been found and lost again?" inquired Holmes with a lift of eyebrow.

"Meaning that Ormond Sacker was found this morning in the waiting room of the railway station at Liverpool, sitting on a bench with his legs crossed, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and a newspaper in his lap, stiff as a board. Stone dead," he added.

"Without a mark on him," said Holmes.

Lestrade tried valiantly not to rise to this bait, but failed. "All right. How did you know?"

"Because I know who killed him, and therefore I know how. For the same reason I know that no luggage was found with him."

Lestrade sighed. "I don't suppose you would favor me with the reason why as well, as long as you're about it?"

"Ah, that is another puzzle. At this point the only reasons I could suggest would be guesses, and you know how I abhor guessing."

"At any rate," Lestrade went on, "the autopsy is scheduled for tonight in Liverpool. I wondered if you would care to go along with me and see what there is to be seen."

"Sacker was murdered by the one you call Garnett; the method was poison, and the autopsy will not find it," came a low voice from the chemical corner. We all turned our attention to see Miss Smith, her face in her hands,

in that hunched posture which I now knew to be indicative of the highest tension.

"I hate to sound like an echo of the good inspector," said Holmes quietly, "but how do you know that the autopsy will not find the poison?"

"Because," she said into her hands, "the coroner in New York couldn't find it either."

Holmes smiled a beatific smile. "Ah," he said. "The last piece." He went to her and took her hands gently from her face. "Now, Cordelia, try not to be upset," he said in the same earnest tones he had used to such good effect before, "but I want you to tell me what you recall. Remember, you are safe now."

"It's all jumbled up in my mind," she began. "But there was a man, a rich man with shady connections, who died suddenly in New York, oh, a few months ago or a little longer. It was what first made me suspect, or rather, what first made me take my suspicions seriously. He-Garnett-had a laboratory on the top floor of a big, fine house-I must have worked there, I don't think I lived there. I was sitting in a corner, working on extracting an equation from a data curve, when he came in with another man, a wealthy-looking, Italian sort of fellow.

"Do you guarantee your product?" asked the Italian.

"Well, you can hardly expect me to put it in writing," replied the one you call Garnett-I'm sure that's not his right name.

'Five thousand dollars is a rather steep price for a packet no bigger than my thumbnail,' said the Italian.

"Oh, smaller, smaller," said Garnett. "But you must remember, you are also purchasing my professional discretion."

"It seems to me," said the Italian coldly, "that is a blade with two edges." "Not at all," replied Garnett with a sort of poisonous cheeriness. "You asked me for a new, effective rat-killer; I supplied it. What you do with it afterwards is hardly my responsibility. Besides, no questions will be asked."

"Rat poison; how true," laughed the Italian. And they went into a part of the laboratory that was always kept locked. The Italian was the rich man's cousin; I saw a picture in the paper about the funeral."

"What else do you remember?" pressed Holmes.

"Nothing!" Her fist thumped down upon the deal table in her frustration, making the glassware rattle. "It's just another image with no context."

"It's enough for now." Holmes walked to the center of the room and stood before the fireplace, momentarily indecisive. "I admit, Inspector, to a strong temptation to accompany you up to Liverpool and see the scene first hand. However, Garnett is surely far from there by now. If I could but penetrate his reasoning - but I can't make bricks without straw. Liverpool it must be. I shall be packed in five minutes. Watson," he turned to me, "oblige me by escorting Miss Smith home, will you? I'll get in touch with you tomorrow night. And," he lowered his voice, "don't let her go out alone, my dear fellow."

"You anticipate some danger to her person?" I asked quietly. "I thought it was Sacker who wanted her killed, not Garnett. Is she not safe now?"

"I shouldn't care to put it to an empirical test," he replied. "At least not while I'm gone."

I nodded, and turned to collect my patient and her things. As the two cabs for which we had sent Billy arrived at the front door, Holmes and Lestrade came down the stairs, now equipped for the journey. Lestrade was saying, "I have the schedule. The tram for Liverpool leaves in just under an hour."

"Good," replied Holmes. "It will give us just time to stop at the Wigmore Street Post Office and send a cable to Brazil."

"Brazil! But this case has nothing whatever to do with Brazil," protested Lestrade, getting into their cab. "The United States, yes, but not South America."

"No? I must be mistaken, then," Holmes's voice floated back blandly as the cab bore them away. "Wigmore Street Post Office, cabby."

The next evening I received a telephone call in my study from Holmes in Baker Street. This was a rather unusual occurrence, as he was not fond of the instrument, being addicted from long habit to telegrams when in a hurry and a personal visit when not.

"How is Miss Smith today?" was his first question.

"Improved," was my reply. "When she awoke this morning, she was able to recall a great deal about living in Boston and New York. I took her to see Sir Morris Stein, the great neurologist around the corner in Harley Street. I've referred one or two cases to him before. He's a remarkable fellow, semi-retired now to work on his books, but he owes me a favor. He concurs she's not brain damaged - puts her amnesia down to a combination of drugs, post-hypnotic suggestion, and exhaustion from terror. He thinks her loss of memory as to recent events is going to continue to pass off spontaneously over the next few weeks without further treatment."

"And her amnesia about her early life?"

"He beat around the bush about that. Said he wanted to see her once a week for a while. He said a curious thing - that he didn't think this fellow Garnett was capable of building such a wall between her mind and her memory entirely without help. But he wouldn't explain what he meant. Could there be yet another doctor involved in the case?"

"Interesting. No, I don't think that's what he meant. I have a theory about her early life-but this is not the time. My dear fellow, do you suppose you could get your wife and servants out of the house for a few days?"

"Good God, Holmes, why?"

"It has to do with what I didn't find in Liverpool. This has been quite a case for negative data. Of course, I expected not to find Garnett, the excess luggage-if Garnett's the man I think him, it has probably been sent to Wooton-Under-the-Edge or some such place, to be left until called for-or a traceable poison in Sacker's body, and indeed all these things failed to turn up, right on schedule. But the crowning absence, the one I didn't expect, is the absence of motive for the slaying of Sacker. That has proved to be the keystone.

"I've been wrong about Garnett, Watson; wrong from the very beginning. I had assumed, that because he refused to kill Miss Smith or allow her to be killed or otherwise molested, that he was a man of greater moral scruples as well as greater intelligence than his partner; that, in short, he was a sane and rational gentleman, within the limits of his criminality. Wrong.

"Watson, the man is a megalomaniac of the first order. The springs of his actions are not reason and intelligence, but vision and obsession. And the name of his obsession is Cordelia Smith."

"Do you think he will come back to London and try to kill her?" I asked, horrified.

"Not exactly. I think he's going to come back to London and try to kidnap her. And we shall be waiting to take him in the trap. Thus the removal of your wife and servants, both to clear the path and to get them out of harm's way."

"But what about Miss Smith? You can't stake her out like a goat at a tiger hunt!" I protested indignantly.

"I can't spring a trap without bait, either. I think you rather underestimate Miss Smith. I believe she will wish to be in at the kill. She once described herself as the ghost of a murdered woman, as I recall. No, she has no love for Garnett, whatever distorted feelings he may harbor towards her.

"I'm having your place watched as discreetly as I can. I don't think Garnett will strike tonight; he needs a little time to prepare a hiding place, among other things. Inspector Lestrade is cooperating, under protest; he would rather be expending his considerable energies combing Ireland, I understand. I shall be along some time tomorrow to help set up, hopefully without being seen. Give my regards to Mrs. Watson, will you?" He rang off.

I sighed, and steeled myself to break Holmes's news to my wife. She is a patient woman, but turning her out of her home to make way for a midnight visit by a poisoning madman was going rather outside her experience, even for the interests of justice. However, she took it better than I had hoped, and although I suspect it was the cause of some coolness between herself and Holmes for a time thereafter, I was able to see her safely off for a visit to some friends at Greenwich early the next morning. Miss Smith had shown far less alarm than Alicia when Holmes's plan was revealed to her. She merely smiled, and expressed herself willing to cooperate to the best of her abilities. Later in the morning, however, she came down to my study to ask if I had an extra handgun which she might carry upon her person.

"Both Holmes and I shall be armed," I reassured her. "And Inspector Lestrade will have men outside. There will be no need for you to get involved in the unpleasantness." She accepted this after some hesitation. Privately, I breathed a sigh of relief; after her performance in the back garden, I was uncertain of how she would behave if armed.

About three in the afternoon there came a ring at my front door. Answering it of necessity myself, I beheld a thin, bent old man, whose wizened face and rheumy eyes were framed by white side-whiskers.

"Dr. Watson, is it? I was told you was the man to see about the rheumatics," he said in a high, thin quaver.

I had seen the disguise before, but it never ceased to amaze me. However, I kept a straight face, and invited the old man inside. As I closed the door, Holmes straightened up with a sigh of relief.

"It's a good disguise," he remarked, depositing cane, hat, and side-whiskers upon my hall table. "But good heavens, I think I should be seeing you in earnest about the rheumatics if I had to keep it up for very long. I've received answers from Boston and New York. Is your resident patient within?"

"She's reading in the study."

Miss Smith looked up in quick alarm as we entered, but her face relaxed into a smile when she saw Holmes. "Is all prepared, then?" she inquired.

"Very nearly," Holmes responded easily. "Lestrade will move his men into position at dusk. In a moment we three shall hold a council of war as to how best receive our nocturnal visitor, assuming he comes tonight, and also assuming he comes at all. If I were he, I would be halfway to St. Petersburg by now.

"But before that: I have received these cables." He took them out of his breast pocket. "I'm afraid Tufts was disappointing. They tell me they have not had a student named Cordelia Smith or Cordelia Smith-something within the last fifteen years."

"But that can't be!" began my patient.

Holmes held up a hand. "My New York correspondent, however, tells me that a gentleman by the name of Lt. Oser of the New York Police Department has been searching high and low for over a month for a lady by the name of Cordelia Naismith, who disappeared one night along with one Dr. James Helmuth and his private secretary, named Orville Sandeman, both of whom are desired urgently by the New York Police for questioning."

The lady sank back into her chair with a long, low sigh. "Calvin Oser," she breathed. "Thank God."

Holmes gave a little bow. "The gentleman is a friend of yours, I take it. In that case you will be happy to know that he took ship for London from New York last night."

"An old friend," she replied, pleased relief upon her features. "I can't recall now how I first met him, but he was my friend in New York. I went to him when I first began to suspect about James Helmuth, yes, that was his name-when I began to suspect there was something peculiar going on from his laboratory. I kept my eyes open and reported to him, hoping to pick up something that would be concrete evidence. I can remember telling him at the last not to make a move until he heard from me." She rubbed her forehead. "What happened after that, now?"

"Presumably, this Garnett-Helmuth fellow suspected you were a spy," I interjected.

"Yes," she replied. "It is just on the tip of my memory, I can feel it." "Perhaps Helmuth himself will tell us, if we can but lay hands upon him tonight," said Holmes. "To turn for a moment from speculation to the practical: presumably he will come in by the back, so as to remain unseen, or so he thinks. Now it is not my wish to expose Miss Naismith to any more physical danger than absolutely necessary, therefore.

He was interrupted by a ring at my front door. "Now who can that be?" "Probably a patient," I replied, rising. "Don't get up, my dear fellow.

I've made arrangements to send all my emergencies today to Anstruther down the way. I'll just send him along."

I opened my front door to disclose a tall, clean-shaven gentleman of about fifty-five, dressed with great neatness and propriety. His bright eyes met mine with congenial directness. A cab waited in the street behind him.

"Dr. Watson?" he inquired politely.

"Yes, but Dr. Anstruther is taking my calls today," I replied. "A family emergency. He is just down the street-Number 114."

"Ah, how disappointing. You were particularly recommended to me. Well, my case is not urgent. Might I step in and make an appointment for another time? Thank you."

I closed the door behind him and turned to lead the way to my consulting room, which adjoined my study and was where my books were kept. As I entered the room ahead of him I felt something cold brush the back of my neck. Turning, I found myself looking down the gleaming barrel of a well-oiled revolver.

"Ah," I cried in a good, loud voice, after an instant's pause. "Dr. James Helmuth, is it? We were not expecting you to call so early."

"I imagine not," he agreed affably. "But it's no good, I'm afraid; I know there's no one here but you, my friend Miss Naismith, and that old man who came in a while ago. Now, I have no desire to inconvenience you in any way. Kindly do me the favor of calling down Miss Naismith, and we will just be on our way." His pistol never wavered from my head.

"Not so fast, Dr. Helmuth," came Holmes's voice suavely as he stepped into the consulting room from the study, his cocked revolver in his hand and Miss Naismith at his shoulder. His face abruptly went cold and still as he saw my predicament. Miss Naismith neither screamed nor shrank, but her eyes widened, then narrowed to a freezing watchfulness.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, is it?" inquired the hawk-faced doctor. "What a surprise. A privilege to meet you, I'm sure."

"I'm sorry I cannot say the same," returned Holmes, covering Helmuth with the same still intensity with which Helmuth covered me.

"What a piquant situation," continued Helmuth, unruffled. "A Mexican standoff, in the vivid phraseology of my adopted country. Just take your pistol by the barrel and lay it on the desk over there, will you? Ah, you wish to point out that if I shoot Dr. Watson you will surely shoot me. True, but would it not be rather cold consolation for the death of such an old and dear friend? And really, no shooting need take place at all. I was sure you would see reason.

This last as Holmes, grey with anger, mortification, and a cold suppressed fear, placed his pistol upon my consulting room desk.

"Very good. Now just stand in the middle of the room over there." He took a hypodermic from his pocket and tossed it lightly to land upon an easy chair near Holmes. "Now, Cordelia, my pet, Mr. Holmes is just going to give you an injection to calm your nerves. Go to him."

No one moved. "Now, really, anyone would think I was intending to carry you off to do you harm instead of good. Nonsense. Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, I would no more intentionally injure this lady than I would take a penknife to the Mona Lisa. It would be aesthetic sacrilege. You are all making a great deal of fuss over very little."

"Not a penknife," replied Miss Naismith, a kind of Arctic light in her eyes. "But I can very easily imagine you taking a brush and palette to her, to 'improve' the picture."

"I'm waiting," replied Helmuth coldly. Out of the corner of my eye I could see his finger tighten on the trigger.

Miss Naismith shrugged, and started to walk in front of the desk toward Holmes. As she passed it she whirled softly and aimed Holmes's pistol toward us. "Lewis Brookman!" she cried.

Astonishment filled the doctor's eye a moment, and his pistol wavered toward her an uncertain instant. She fired.

His gun went off by my head, but the bullet buried itself in the ceiling as he staggered backward, blood spattering from his shattered arm. Holmes and I were on him in an instant and wrested his pistol from his broken grasp. He tried to fight us, but his wound was too much for him and he passed out. I applied a tourniquet as Holmes hastily called the Yard.

"My dear friend, I owe you my profoundest apologies," Holmes said earnestly later, when Lestrade had carried off his unconscious prize and we were left alone once more. A reaction had come upon me when it was all over, I am unashamed to report, and I poured us each a stiff whiskey with hands that shook. Miss Naismith as usual refused spirits.

"My miscalculations were only exceeded by Helmuth's own," Holmes continued. "I never imagined he would walk into our trap before it was set. A just Providence must have heard me twitting Lestrade. And yet when you think

about it, his approach was most logical, if bold. Why should a man his age take up the techniques of a car burglar?"

"He was always smooth like that," put in Miss Naismith. "He would be under your guard and through your heart before you knew he'd drawn steel. It's how he took me in."

She sighed. "It's been coming back to me, bit by bit. It was my own fault, really. Sheer stupidity."

"I'd been watching his operation for some time. I thought Calvin Oser and I would be able finally to nail him on the possession of certain poisons. I was going to steal Cal some samples for comparison analyses. That, plus my testimony on what I'd seen and overheard in my time there, would be enough to go to court."

"Then one evening as I was about to leave for my rooming house, Helmuth astonished me utterly by coming up to the lab and asking me to marry him. I didn't quite know what to say."

"How could you consider such a proposition from such a man even for an instant?" I asked, amazed.

"Well, I don't know. I knew his past wouldn't bear looking into, but then neither would mine. I've never been afraid of poisonous snakes, ever since I used to hunt rattlers for the county bounty when I was young, for pocket money. I didn't realize that the rattlesnakes were the more gentlemanly fellows, who always gave fair warning before they struck. I had always been impressed by his brilliance. It seemed to me that he had not patronized me for my sex, for he always demanded perfection in my work, and I respected him for it. And to tell the truth, I was foolishly flattered-my first proposal and all that. Also, I was tired. I was so shaken, I had this romantic vision of requiring him to give up his criminal activities. Would it not be better to reform that amazing brain than punish it? And I would be the instrument of that reform." She laughed, but her laugh had an edge that worried me. "I hinted as much, rather broadly. I then realized from what he said that he had apparently thought me blind and deaf all those months, and witless too. He was genuinely shocked that I was on to him."

"He begged me to give him a day to think it over, hinted that he was profoundly moved. When I returned the next day, he walked up to me smiling and told me how utterly impressed he was with my moral reasoning, then put a pad of chloroform over my mouth and nose, and that's the last thing I remember clearly until I woke up in that little room in Camberwell."

"He must have wanted to make me over into a kind of perfect docile wife. He was in the habit of keeping dangerous pets-poisonous snakes, and a vicious ocelot-and collecting aesthetic rarities. He just wanted to add me to his collection."

"It is a kind of disease that I inspire in all my friends; he just had it in an acute form. They have always wanted to change me to match some vision of reality they have inside their own minds. My cousin wanted me to be a suffragette, her husband wanted me to be a doctor; Dr. Watson wants me to give up smoking and take up wine imbibing, Mrs. Watson wants me to change my style of clothes and hair, and Cal Oser's the worst of all-he wants me to be a lady."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Holmes," she continued, turning to my friend, "you are probably the most unique individual I've ever met. Not once in our acquaintance have you ever asked me to be like anything but myself."

"What I still don't understand," I said, "is why Garnett, Helmuth or whatever his name is, killed this fellow Sacker, or Sandeman."

"Sandeman could be very irritating at times," said Miss Naismith reminiscently. "In personality he was a weak bully, with a tendency to swagger over those he thought he could dominate. He tried some tricks with me once, and I surprised the very devil out of him by putting him through a window. He left me alone after that. He'd been with Helmuth a long time-came with him from South America, I believe. Perhaps he had tried attempting a bit of blackmail on the side. It would be like him, and Helmuth would be a very unsafe person to do that to."

"I shouldn't be surprised if there turns out to be some such element involved also," said Holmes. "But I submit that the principal reason he was poisoned was for the crime of lese majeste. It was his independent attempt to murder you, Miss Naismith, that sealed his fate. Helmuth's (or Brookman's, as I expect my answer from Brazil will prove) motivations for his actions throughout this case have been so very bizarre, that I rather expect that his ultimate destination will be Broadmoor rather than Dartmoor."

The arrival of Lt. Calvin Oser the next week, plus the reply to Holmes's cable to Rio, served to fill in the remaining blanks in the recent history of my patient and her two kidnappers. New York had known Helmuth only as an English doctor who had been employed for many years by a New York pharmaceutical concern as their field representative in Brazil. He had emigrated from Brazil to America on the strength of this employment, then set up his own little firm in New York. It did a legitimate business, although not enough to account for his wealth. The first assistant Helmuth had hired to run this end of the business had vanished mysteriously after not quite two years of employment. Lt. Oser had been connected with the case at that time, but no explanation of the young man's disappearance was ever forthcoming. Thus when his old acquaintance Miss Naismith came to him with her first suspicions of a second and far more sinister pharmaceutical business running under the mask of the first, he was able to counsel her with utmost seriousness. Working together, they had garnered nearly enough evidence for an arrest when Miss Naismith, Dr. Helmuth, and his secretary Sandeman abruptly disappeared. Oser had followed a false trail to St. Louis before Holmes's telegram sent him racing to catch the next ship to London.

The reply from Rio was less conclusive, but testimony later from Helmuth confirmed the hypothesis it suggested. Dr. Lewis Brookman had left the Hospital San Felice at the request of its administration for "irregular activities," and had disappeared up the Amazon upon a botanical expedition. The first appearance of "James Helmuth" took place 10 months later in Manaos. The two were one and the same man.

Lt. Oser proved to be a surprise to me. I had built up a rather romantic mental image of the gentleman on the basis of Miss Naismith's obvious delight in his arrival. I escorted Miss Naismith around to Baker Street to greet him on the evening of his landing, his day having been spent on the business at Scotland Yard.

The man who stood upon the hearth rug at our entry was in late middle age, with thinning sandy hair shot through with grey, and twinkling blue eyes deep set under tufted brows. He had clearly been a muscular athlete, much outdoors, in his youth, but the more recent comforts of city life had broadened his figure. Except for a certain pugnacity of jaw and keenness of glance, one might have taken him for a shopkeeper contemplating retirement.

"Cordelia, you are a sight for sore eyes," he smiled at Miss Naismith, and took her awkwardly by the hand. "Mr. Holmes has been telling me about your troubles. You all right, girl?"

She smiled in return and gave a quick nod. "I... I'm feeling better each day. I still can't remember everything, though a little bit more comes back every time..." She searched his face, a little desperately it seemed to me, and there was a tension in her. "I remember Boston, and New York."

"Do you remember Crazy Callaghan, and your poor old dad?"

She hesitated. "No."

He cocked his head and studied her a moment, lips pursed. "I see."

Holmes dragged another chair around and rang for tea, and we all sat down around the cold fireplace.

"I take it then," I said to the lieutenant, "that you knew Miss Naismith as a young girl."

Lt. Oser chuckled. "Yes, although it would be just as true to say I knew her as a young boy-or a young hooligan."

"What?" I'm afraid I must have looked as bewildered as I felt, for Holmes smiled behind his hand.

"Lt. Oser has a remarkable story to tell, Watson," said the detective. "Much that was murky becomes clear. Listen."

Lt. Oser looked uncertainly at Miss Naismith. "I don't know. Do you think I should talk to this doctor-feller, Stein, first? I don't want to say something upsetting."

"I definitely think you should see Dr. Stein before you return to New York," said Holmes. "However, I spoke with him yesterday about your visit, and asked him very much the same question. Boiled down, his reply was that the upsetting parts would have to be gone through sooner or later, and that sooner was just as good as later. Also, I feel Miss Naismith has a right to know what we know, and Dr. Watson is here. But perhaps we should let Miss Naismith decide."

We turned to this lady, who was curled up in the basket chair in sad, solemn attentiveness. "Go ahead," she said tonelessly.

"That's my Cord," said Lt. Oser. "I've never known her to shirk a difficulty yet. She stuck with her old Dad right down to the bitter end in that dirty little border hole. But I'm getting my story hind end first.

"I should tell you, gentlemen, that I was a territorial marshal in New Mexico back in '84 when I first met this lady. I guess she must have been about 16 then, though I took her for younger. Those were the bad old days in those parts. I was back last year-to think how the place has changed in one lifetime! I felt like a time-traveler in one of those writer-feller's books. Her old dad-he was an Englishman, he'd been a doctor in California before his wife died and the dipsomania got to him-had a bee in his bonnet about her safety, not that he was too far out, and had her dress up to pass off as his son. They were good at it, too. I knew 'em a year and a half before I tumbled to it.

"They were hooked up with a feller named Crazy Callaghan. Prospecting, they said, though Callaghan made more money off cards, till somebody caught him at it one day in a bar in Mexico and shot him. That was later, though, after Doc Naismith had died and Cordelia went to Boston to her mama's cousin.

"Now, what old Doc was prospecting for turned out to be two fellers who'd done him a bad turn, I might say a very bad turn, in California. This situation first came to my attention when one of the two was found hanging from a tree just down the mountain from Cloudercroft. This was in '86. When we finally got him identified I was inclined to think that someone had done the community a service, and let it go at that, but my old devil curiosity was aroused, and one thing led to another.

"Now, I had about caught up with Doc Naismith and Callaghan at a little town not far from Taos when a peculiar thing happened. A feller by the name of Nelson Ball, who was wanted by the Texas Rangers in connection with a mail robbery, came up to me and asked to turn himself in. Now, this feller had been successfully evading the law all over the West for a number of years, so you can imagine it struck me as a bit out of character. It was hard to tell with a hard-boiled so-and-so like Ball, but it came to me the man was scared of something-more scared than he was of the law. So I broke off to escort him up to jail in Taos.

"One night about a day's ride from Taos, Crazy Callaghan dropped in on our camp. He just seemed to want to jaw over old times and take a cup of coffee with me. Now, I didn't trust Callaghan further than I could toss him, but I was damned if I could figure out what his game was this time. I fell asleep puzzling over it, and woke with a hell of a headache to find that Ball and Callaghan had bolted, except they seemed to have left Ball's horse behind-found it all saddled and bridled, grazing loose where mine was picketed.

"I sat down and thought it over for a while, then got up for a look-see. I can't say I was really surprised when I found Ball's body shot full of holes in a little gully about a mile from my camp. His gun had fired twice. So I took him on up to Taos, and after a day's more thought, got a warrant sworn out for Doc Naismith. Friends are friends, but the law's the law.

"I overtook 'em in a little border town. Old Doc was dying of the fits by then. I was surprised he'd lasted that long. Callaghan went over the border, but Cordelia of course stayed with her dad, nursing him as best she could. I lent her some money, and we saw the thing through to the end and had him buried decently.

"Now, I'd found out the only relative Miss Cordelia had in the world besides her dad was a cousin of her mama's in the East. So I took her up to Santa Fe, bought her a dress and a one-way ticket to Boston, and put her on the train. She was inclined to kick at first, till I pointed out to her that Crazy Callaghan was never known to carry any other weapon but a shotgun, being a lousy aim and scared to death of snakes, and old Doc was so shaky at the end he couldn't have hit a barn at ten feet. Then she got more reasonable and did as I asked. You gentlemen both have already heard part of that story, so I'm not giving anything away; besides, it's ancient history now, and you are gentlemen.

"Later when I moved east so my wife could be with her people, I ran into Cordelia in New York and was pleased to see how well my good turn had come out. So it was no surprise when she caught on to that snake Helmuth that she brought her story to me. The rest you know. Though I'll swear I'd have pulled her out of there like a shot if I'd known how things were going to turn out."

Partway through this narrative Miss Naismith had folded her arms around her knees and turned her face from us. When she turned it back in the ensuing silence, her features were under control, although her cheeks were wet.

"Tea?" offered Holmes without comment.

"Thank you." She took the cup and drank from it. The simple domestic action seemed to help her pull herself together. "Thank you, Cal," she went on in a steadier voice. "It comes back. In jumbled bits, but it does come back. I suppose it must."

Sherlock Holmes searched for a word of comfort. "Miss Naismith, there may have been times of horror, but you shouldn't try to put away your past. It made you what you are, and what you are is nothing to be ashamed of."