SHOT INTO WONDERLAND · A TALE OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH

By FREDERICK R. BURTON.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

An Australian gold miner, Otto, and his cousin, Hugo, are suspected of stealing gold dust from Rawlin, who owns the gold mines, and both are forced to leave the camp, Rawlin joining them later on. They meet Dr. Gabriel von Dietrich, a scientist, and start for the interior, going down a river with a raft and canoe. At the base of a high mountain Hugo leaps ashore and shoots Rawlin, who attempts to land, while Otto and von Dietrich are carried by the current underneath the mountain to a strange country on the other side, where long-whiskered inhabitants, speaking Hebrew, bid them welcome.

CHAPTER IX—(Continued).

"Anything of yours, Otto?" he asked.

I started when I saw the envelope, for though the address was obliterated there was a mark upon it that had not been wholly washed out, and I recognized it. This was the envelope marked by an X that I had seen among Hugo's effects away back at Rawlin's Gap.

The contents of that envelope went far to solving my mystery and determining my course.

CHAPTER X.

Hugo's Plot.

My first feeling when I recognized the envelope was somewhat akin to grief. I hope I am no weak sentimentalist, but I confess that this evidence that Hugo had perished in his struggle with Rawlin gave me momentary pain.

For all that strange act of treachery, Hugo and I had been close companions for so long and through so many hardships that the thought of his death was painful. I had yet to learn how little he deserved a regretful thought.

He and I had commonly shared our letters, and yet I hesitated to open this, great though my desire was to read something from home.

"Especially marked as it is," thought I, "there may be something of importance here that I ought to know. If eventually I should return to Germany I might be able to make a more satisfactory report of Hugo's fate if I should know the contents of this letter. The writing may be obliterated, but I will try at least to discover from whom it came."

Opening it, I found that though the writing was blurred here and there I could decipher substantially the whole of it. The first thing that struck me was the date, which showed that the letter was written subsequently to the last mail which had come to Rawlin's Gap. Therefore, Hugo must have received it and failed to mention the fact.

"Probably," thought I, "he got it on that last trip to the coast at which time he claimed that no mail came for us."

I glanced at the signature. It was from a younger brother of Hugo and there was an envelope signed by the name of a man whom I remembered as a lawyer in our city. With growing forebodings I began to read.

There was first a plain statement that a similar letter and inclosure had been addressed to me, so that in the event of the death of one of us the other should be apprised of the facts. Then followed an account of the demise of a wealthy relative who had left his property to me, or a big share of it, with a condition that if I did not survive him, my share was to go to Hugo.

It took a good many words to set this forth, but I have given all that is essential to an understanding of my situation.

My mind reverted to the incidents at the Gap. Hugo evidently had suppressed the duplicate letter addressed to me, or, granting that he might not have received it, he had plainly tried to bring about my death.

The miners might have hanged me for the supposed theft of Rawlin's dust, I recalled that trip to Rawlin's cabin after Hugo's wallet. Did my cousin, hesitating at the prospect of encompassing my destruction, hope that I would accidentally discover this letter and thus open the way for a frank statement from him?

I recalled his moodiness, indecision, bursts of temper, and the moments when he seemed on the point of saying something which he could not bring himself to say. Were not these manifestations of a struggle with temptation?

It may be so, but in that case the temptation, with all its crime, proved to be too strong, and if I could charitably admit that Hugo hesitated, I had also to admit that he yielded.

But that rifle shot when we were both in our cabin? I had been certain that Harvey and Reagan were concerned in that as in other features of the plot. Were they, after all, innocent?

"I could not understand it, but I had to believe that I had held them guilty without foundation.

Von Dietrich broke in on my meditations.

"Well, Otto," said he, "are you convinced that it's reality, or is it still a dream?"

"I wish it were a dream," said I, handing him the letter.

He read it through carefully.

"So," he remarked, "you came to Australia to find a fortune and one has turned up for you in Germany."

"I am thinking of Hugo," I responded.

"That seems to me to be a waste of nerve force. I am sorry that he should have been so perverted by greed, for he impressed me as having fine qualities. I confess to a kind of gratitude for him. Of course I might have discovered this tribe unaided, but the fact is that he led me here. Morbora, you see, told him about the river that disappeared mysteriously in a mountain, and Hugo planned to lure us as he did to destruction. It's all plain enough."

"Including," said I, "his effort to save you from the catastrophe."

"Yes. I remember that he wanted me to accompany him on the canoe. Rather than fail in causing your death, he chose to sacrifice me also. I must say he has my forgiveness. I suppose you want to go back to Germany?"

This last was said abruptly and I was taken by surprise.

"I have not, said so," I answered.

"No, but it would be very strange if now that you are a rich man you should prefer to stay here with a scientist exploring the history of a forgotten people. These Jews are comparatively primitive in their habits and ideas, but even they have made advances in the course of centuries. They are evidently a peaceable, reasonable people. I shall be wonderfully happy among them. As for you, we will see what can be done and at once."

He proceeded forthwith to get those extraordinarily ancient gentlemen around him and they conversed for a long time, not less than an hour.

They stroked their immense beards, glanced gravely at me, shook their heads, and comported themselves altogether so solemnly that I was quite convinced that they insisted on keeping me with them. At last Von Dietrich left them and made his report.

"You may go," he said at once. "They permit it with no little hesitation and regret, partly because they are convinced that no man can surmount the obstacles which nature has set around this region, and partly because they fear that your return to the outer world will be but the prelude to an invasion by others of our race.

"I tell them in answer to their first objection that you are an experienced traveler and that you are perfectly content to take the chances. For the second I can only assure them that it will not be to your interest to return or send anybody here, and I have inspired them with so much confidence that they have given a reluctant consent."

"Then," said I, "the sooner I start the better. They may change their minds."

"No, you need not fear that. They suggest that you partake of their hospitality for the rest of the day and night, and you'd better do so, for that volcano isn't going to be an easy climb."

Of course, I agreed, and, truth to say, I was beginning to feel a keen regret at thought of parting from Von Dietrich, but home seemed to be calling with imperative voice, and the prospect of an easy life among my own people was too alluring to be resisted.

We dined in one of the patriarchal houses, reclining as we have been taught to understand was the habit of the Jews thousands of years ago. And that night I slept upon a bed.

Early the next morning I was off on my lonesome journey.

"I am not going to bind you in any way, Otto," said Von Dietrich, when we parted, "for I trust you implicitly. I will simply suggest that the discovery of the lost tribe of Israel is mine. You are with me, to be sure, but what avail would your discovery be? Would it have occurred to you——"

"Doctor," I interrupted, "I understand you perfectly. I shall let you work out this great feat without interference. Your book will make you immortal and I shall not seek to diminish your credit by posing even as your companion."

"It will be better so," he said, simply, "for if you should say that you had been with me and give a hint of this discovery, a small army of European scholars would scale these mountains intent upon sharing with me the glory of historical research. There is a life work before me here. Therefore, let the years pass in silence. When I am ready I shall somehow make known my work to the world. Farewell, Otto."

And so I have kept silent till now, and I feel that I am not breaking faith in this writing, for the searching party may likely enough come upon the lost tribe. Von Dietrich may be dead, though I doubt it exceedingly, for if I am still alive in this tempestuous climate, he should be in abounding health in the Garden of Life.

But other things than death may happen to rob an explorer of the fruits of his research, and I therefore forestall any other claims to the discovery of the lost tribe of Israel by asserting here from my knowledge that the credit belongs to Dr. Gabriel Von Dietrich.

It would take a long book to describe my weary journey back to the coast, and it would not be profitable reading. From his observation of the great volcano the doctor was able to suggest to me the most practicable route over it, and, well provisioned for days of travel over those barren ledges, I got on with no worse experience than fatigue and some few narrow escapes in descending the steep eastern slopes.

After that the way was comparatively simple, though toilsome. Von Dietrich gave me his stock of tobacco, an article unknown to the Jews, and which was invaluable in purchasing supplies and other assistance from the black natives.

So at length I came to the coast without having learned anything definite concerning the fate of Hugo and Rawlin. It was difficult to get any information from the blacks along the way, for I was not skillful in the sign language, and I was forced to believe that both had fallen into the river while struggling with each other, and had perished.

My quickest way home involved a trip to Sydney by a coasting vessel, and at that city there was a delay of some days before I could go on. I spent the time on shore.

About noon of the second day I saw a tall, raw-boned man seated on a doorstep, smoking. I crossed over to him at once.

"How are you, Rawlin?" said I.

"Geewhittaker!" he exclaimed, with a long breath, as he took his pipe slowly from his mouth. Then he arose, seized my hand, and danced around me extravagantly.

"So you got out of it!" he cried.

"Sure," I replied, "and you, too."

His brow clouded and he stood still.

"Do you know what he did to me?" he demanded with shrill intensity, and then added with a significant gesture. "He's over there."

"He? Who? Where?" I stammered.

"That devil of a Hugo," he answered. "I suspected him from the word go. I believed he had it in for you, but there was no use hinting anything to you, for you were so trustful. You'd have slapped my face if I had suggested that you ought to be on your guard against your cousin. Well, convinced not only that he had put up the job on you by stealing my dust, and that he had tried to kill you when it seemed likely that the miners wouldn't hang you, I made up my mind to follow you both and see if I could fathom his motives and prevent mischief.

"Maybe you remember how close I stuck to you during the march with the German scientist. I was afraid if I let you out of my sight he'd stick a knife into you. But he had a better scheme, didn't he, the low down villain! You saw us fighting there by the river. Well, sir, he shot me twice, left me for dead and took away my bag of dust with him."

"Robbed your body, Rawlin?"

"That's what he did, by thunder! but I recovered. I'm not easily killed, Smitty, and I got on his track as soon as I could crawl. I've traced him step by step across the country and down the coast until I've located him in that house across the way. I lodge here, understand, in this house. They say over there that he's sick. Humph! I've got no fight with a sick man, but here I stay till he gets well, and when he shows his rascally face outside of that door, it will be his last look at daylight."

He touched the butt of his revolver as he spoke. This was indeed the old Rawlin of the Gap, self willed, determined, aye, bloodthirsty.

"I will go and see him," said I, and Rawlin made no protest or comment.

He waited for me, resuming his smoking on the doorstep of his lodging house.

At the house across the way a woman told me that there was a sick man within who refused absolutely to see anybody.

"Tell him," said I, "that it is his cousin, Otto Schmidt."

The woman shut the door in my face and was gone a minute or two. When she returned she admitted me and took me to a back room up stairs. There I found Hugo, wasted to a mere shadow, the finger mark of death upon his brow.

"Have you seen him?" he asked in a whisper, and his eyes glowed with terror. "Don't let him come in," he added. "He would kill me, as he has a right to do. I have lived in the hope that you might come, Otto."

All my hard thoughts of Hugo were swept away. It could not be otherwise, seeing how he had suffered. I tried to tell him so, but before I could intimate that I knew all about his treachery, he confessed it, cause, details, and all. He would not let me stop him.

"It was I," he said among other things, "who fired at you in the cabin. During your absence I rigged my rifle with the barrel pointed exactly at the place where your head would be when you slept. I tied a cord to the trigger, ran it into the cabin under the base log, and waited until I was sure you and the rest of the camp were asleep. With the sound of the rifle I believed you were dead, but I ran out, according to the way I had planned it, unfastened my rifle and began to blaze away at nothing so as to make the others believe that the attack had been made by some outsider."

This cleared away the last puzzling remnant of the tragic mystery. I told Hugo that I forgave him and would do what I could to save him.

"It is too late," he answered, "but you may try."

I went for a physician, found one, and was back within an hour. Meantime Hugo had passed away.

Rawlin was still smoking on the steps opposite when I appeared again.

"I am going to engage an undertaker," said I.

The Yankee slowly knocked the ashes from his pipe and accompanied me. After arrangements had been made for the burial of my cousin—and until then Rawlin did not speak—he said: "I hear that gold has been found in Victoria province and I'm off for the new fields."

I tried to persuade him to come with me, but he would not hear of it, and then and there we parted for the last time, for I have not seen or heard from him since.

Owing to the political conditions of which I spoke at the beginning of my narrative, there was a lot of trouble about getting possession of my property, but I finally obtained the greater part of it.

You may know that these same political troubles made it convenient for a good many Germans to leave their native country. Most of them came to the United States, I among the number, and here I have been living from that time.

THE END.

THE ORIGINAL SHERLOCK HOLMES STORIES.

(Continued From Page 2, This Section.)

ing her house, she ran into the back kitchen?"

"Because she had the money there with which to pay off the brokers."

"She has at least an answer for everything. Did you ask her whether in leaving she met any one or saw any one loitering about Charles street?"

"She saw no one but the constable."

"Well, you seem to have cross-examined her pretty thoroughly. What else have you done?"

"The clerk Gorot has been shadowed all these nine weeks, but without result. We can show nothing against him."

"Anything else?"

"Well, we have nothing else to go upon—no evidence of any kind."

"Have you formed any theory about how that bell rang?"

"Well, I must confess that it beats me. It was a cool hand, whoever it was, to go and give the alarm like that."

"Yes, it was a queer thing to do. Many thanks to you for what you have told me. If I can put the man into your hands you shall hear from me. Come along, Watson."

"Where are we going to now?" I asked, as we left the office.

"We are now going to interview Lord Holdhurst, the cabinet minister and future premier of England."

We were fortunate in finding that Lord Holdhurst was still in his chambers in Downing street, and on Holmes sending in his card we were instantly shown up. The statesman received us with that old-fashioned courtesy for which he is remarkable, and seated us on the two luxurant lounges on either side of the fire plate. Standing on the rug between us, with his slight, tall figure, sharp features, thoughtful face, and curling hair prematurely tinged with gray, he seemed to represent that not too common type, a nobleman who is in truth noble.

"Your name is very familiar to me, Mr. Holmes," said he, smiling. "And, of course, I cannot pretend to be ignorant of the object of your visit. There has only been one occurrence in these offices which could call for your attention. In whose interest are you acting, may I ask?"

"In that of Mr. Percy Phelps," answered Holmes.

"Ah, my unfortunate nephew! You can understand that our kinship makes it the more impossible for me to screen him in any way. I fear that the incident must have a very prejudicial effect upon his career."

"But if the document is found?"

"Ah, that, of course, would be different."

"I had one or two questions which I wished to ask you, Lord Holdhurst."

"I shall be happy to give you any information in my power."

"Was it in this room that you gave instructions as to the copying of the document?"

"It was."

"Then you could hardly have been overheard?"

"It is out of the question."

"Did you ever mention to any one that it was your intention to give any one the treaty to be copied?"

"Never."

"You are certain of that?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, since you never said so, and Mr. Philps never said so, and nobody else knew anything of the matter, then the thief's presence in the room was purely accidental. He saw his chance and he took it."

The statesman smiled. "You take me out of my province there," said he.

Holmes considered for a moment. "There is another very important point which I wish to discuss with you," said he. "You feared, as I understand, that very grave results might follow from the details of this treaty becoming known."

A shadow passed over the expressive face of the statesman. "Very grave results indeed."

"And have they occurred?"

"Not yet."

"If the treaty had reached, let us say, the French or Russian Foreign Office, you would expect to hear of it?"

"I should," said Lord Holdhurst, with a wry face.

"Since nearly ten weeks have elapsed, then, and nothing has been heard, it is not unfair to suppose that for some reason the treaty has not reached them."

Lord Holdhurst shrugged his shoulders.

"We can hardly suppose, Mr. Holmes, that the thief took the treaty in order to frame it and hang it up."

"Perhaps he is waiting for a better price."

"If he waits a little longer he will get no price at all. The treaty will cease to be secret in a few months."

"That is most important," said Holmes. "Of course, it is a possible supposition that the thief has had a sudden illness——"

"An attack of brain fever, for example?" asked the statesman, flashing a swift glance at him.

"I did not say so," said Holmes, imperturbably. "And now, Lord Holdhurst, we have already taken up too much of your valuable time, and we shall wish you good-day."

"Every success to your investigation, be the criminal who it may," answered the nobleman, as he bowed us out at the door.

"He's a fine fellow," said Holmes, as we came out into Whitehall. "But he has a struggle to keep up his position. He is far from rich and has many calls. You noticed, of course, that his boots had been resoled. Now, Watson, I won't detain you from your legitimate work any longer. I shall do nothing more today, unless I have an answer to my cab advertisement. But I should be extremely obliged to you if you would come down with me to Woking tomorrow, by the same train which we took yesterday."

I met him accordingly next morning and we traveled down to Woking together. He had had no answer to his advertisement, he said, and no fresh light had been thrown upon the case. He had, when he so willed it, the utter immobility of countenance of a red Indian, and I could not gather from his appearance whether he was satisfied or not with the position of the case. His conversation, I remember, was about the Bertillon system of measurements, and he expressed his enthusiastic admiration of the French savant.

We found our client still under the charge of his devoted nurse, but looking considerably better than before. He rose from the sofa and greeted us without difficulty when we entered.

"Any news?" he asked, eagerly.

"My report, as I expected, is a negative one," said Holmes. "I have seen Forbes, and I have seen your uncle, and I have set one or two trains of inquiry upon foot which may lead to something."

"You have not lost heart, then?"

"By no means."

"God bless you for saying that!" cried Miss Harrison. "If we keep our courage and our patience the truth must come out."

"We have more to tell you than you have for us," said Phelps, reseating himself upon the couch.

"I hoped you might have something."

"Yes, we have had an adventure during the night, and one which might have proved to be a serious one." His expression grew very grave as he spoke, and a look of something akin to fear sprang up in his eyes. "Do you know," said he, "that I begin to believe that I am the unconscious center of some monstrous conspiracy, and that my life is aimed at as well as my honor?"

"Ah!" cried Holmes.

"It sounds incredible, for I have not, as far as I know, an enemy in the world. Yet from last night's experience I can come to no other conclusion."

"Pray let me hear it."

"You must know that last night was the very first night that I have ever slept without a nurse in the room. I was so much better that I thought I could dispense with one. I had a night-light burning, however. Well, about 2 in the morning I had sunk into a light sleep when I was suddenly aroused by a slight noise. It was like the sound which a mouse makes when it is gnawing a plank, and I lay listening to it for some time under the impression that it must come from that cause. Then it grew louder, and suddenly there came from the window a sharp metallic snick. I sat up in amazement. There could be no doubt what the sounds were new. The first ones had been caused by some one forcing an instrument through the slit between the sashes, and the second by the catch being pressed back.

"There was a pause then for about ten minutes, as if the person were waiting to see whether the noise had awakened me. Then I heard a gentle creaking as the window was very slowly opened. I could stand it no longer, for my nerves are not what they used to be. I sprang out of bed and flung open the shutters. A man was crouching at the window. I could see little of him, for he was gone like a flash. He was wrapped in some sort of cloak which came across the lower part of his face. One thing only I am sure of, and that is that he had some weapon in his hand. It looked to me like a long knife. I distinctly saw the gleam of it as he turned to run."

"This is most interesting," said Holmes. "Pray what did you do then?"

"I should have followed him through the open window if I had been stronger. As it was, I rang the bell and roused the house. It took me some little time, for the bell rings in the kitchen and the servants all sleep upstairs. I shouted, however, and that brought Joseph down, and he roused the others. Joseph and the groom found marks on the bed outside the window, but the weather has been so dry lately that they found it hopeless to follow the trail across the grass. There's a place, however, on the wooden fence which skirts the road which shows signs, they tell me, as if some one had got over and had snapped the top of the rail in doing so. I have said nothing to the local police yet, for I thought I had best have your opinion first."

This tale of our client appeared to have an extraordinary effect upon Sherlock Holmes. He rose from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable excitement.

"Misfortunes never come singly," said Phelps, smiling, though it was evident that his adventure had somewhat shaken him.

"You have certainly had your share," said Holmes. "Do you think you could walk round the house with me?"

"Oh, yes, I should like a little sunshine. Joseph will come, too."

"And I also," said Miss Harrison.

"I am afraid not," said Holmes, shaking his head. "I think I must ask you to remain sitting exactly where you are."

The young lady resumed her seat with an air of displeasure. Her brother, however, had joined us and we set off all four together. We passed round the lawn to the outside of the young diplomatist's window. There were, as he had said, marks upon the bed, but they were hopelessly blurred and vague. Holmes stooped over them for an instant, and then rose shrugging his shoulders.

"I don't think any one could make much of this," said he. "Let us go round the house and see why this particular room was chosen by the burglar. I should have thought those larger windows of the drawing room and dining room would have had more attractions for him."

"They are more visible from the road," suggested Mr. Joseph Harrison.

"Ah, yes, of course. There is a door here which he might have attempted. What is it for?"

"It is the side entrance for tradespeople. Of course it is locked at night."

"Have you ever had an alarm like this before?"

"Never," said our client.

"Do you keep plate in the house, or anything to attract burglars?"

"Nothing of value."

Holmes strolled round the house with his hands in his pockets and a negligent air which was unusual with him.

"By the way," said he to Joseph Harrison, "you found some place, I understand, where the fellow scaled the fence. Let us have a look at that!"

The plump young man led us to a spot where the top of one of the wooden rails had been cracked. A small fragment of wood was hanging down. Holmes pulled it off and examined it critically.

"Dou you think that was done last night? It looks rather old, does it not?"

"Well, possibly so."

"There are no marks of any one jumping down upon the other side. No, I fancy we shall get no help here. Let us go back to the bedroom and talk the matter over."

Percy Phelps was walking very slowly, leaning upon the arm of his future brother-in-law. Holmes walked swiftly across the lawn, and we were at the open window of the bedroom long before the others came up.

"Miss Harrison," said Holmes, speaking with the utmost intensity of manner, "you must stay where you are all day. Let nothing prevent you from staying where you are all day. It is of the utmost importance."

"Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Holmes," said the girl in astonishment.

"When you go to bed lock the door of this room on the outside and keep the key. Promise to do this."

"But Percy?"

"He will come to London with us"

"And am I to remain here?"

"It is for his sake. You can serve him. Quick! Promise!"

She gave a quick nod of assent just as the other two came up.

"Why do you sit moping there, Annie?" cried her brother. "Come out into the sunshine!"

"No, thank you, Joseph. I have a slight headache and this room is deliciously cool and soothing."

"What do you propose now, Mr. Holmes?" asked our client.

"Well, in investigating this minor affair we must not lose sight of our main inquiry. It would be a very great help to me if you would come up to London with us."

"At once?"

"Well, as soon as you conveniently can. Say in an hour."

"I feel quite strong enough, if I can really be of any help."

"The greatest possible."

"Perhaps you would like me to stay there tonight?"

"I was just going to propose it."

"Then, if my friend of the night comes to revisit me, he will find the bird flown. We are all in your hands, Mr. Holmes, and you must tell us exactly what you would like done. Perhaps you would prefer that Joseph came with us so as to look after me?"

"Oh, no; my friend Watson is a medical man, you know, and he'll look after you. We'll have our lunch here, if you will permit us, and then we shall all three set off for town together."

It was arranged as he suggested, though Miss Harrison excused herself from leaving the bedroom, in accordance with Holmes' suggestion. What the object of my friend's maneuvers was I could not conceive, unless it were to keep the lady away from Phelps who, rejoiced by his returning health and by the prospect of action, lunched with us in the dining-room. Holmes had a still more startling surprise for us, however, for, after accompanying us down to the station and seeing us into our carriage, he calmly announced that he had no intention of leaving Woking.

"There are one or two small points which I should desire to clear up before I go," said he. "Your absence, Mr. Phelps, will in some ways rather assist me. Watson, when you reach London you would oblige me by driving at once to Baker street with our friend here, and remaining with him until I see you again. It is fortunate that you are old school-fellows, as you must have much to talk over. Mr. Phelps can have the spare bedroom tonight, and I will be with you in time for breakfast, for there is a train which will take me into Waterloo at eight."

"But how about our investigation in London?" asked Phelps, ruefully.

"We can do that tomorrow. I think that just at present I can be of more immediate use here."

"You might tell them at Briarbrae that I hope to be back tomorrow night," cried Phelps, as we began to move from the platform.

"I hardly expect to go back to Briarbrae," answered Holmes, and waved his hand to us cheerily as we shot out from the statios.

Phelps and I talked it over on our journey, but neither of us could devise a satisfactory reason for this new development.

"I suppose he wants to find out some clue as to the burglary last night, if a burglar it was. For myself, I don't believe it was an ordinary thief."

"What is your own idea, then?"

"Upon my word, you may put it down to my weak nerves or not, but I believe there is some deep political intrigue going on around me, and that for some reason that passes my understanding my life is aimed at by the conspirators. It sounds high-flown and absurd, but consider the facts! Why should a thief try to break in at a bedroom window, where there could be no hope of any plunder, and why should he come with a long knife in his hand"

"You are sure it was not a housebreakers' jimmy?"

"Oh, no; it was a knife. I saw the flash of the blade quite distinctly."

"But why on earth should you be pursued with such animosity?"

"Ah, that is the question."

"Well, if Holmes takes the same view, that would account for his action, would it not? Presuming that your theory is correct, if he can lay his hands upon the man who threatened you last night he will have gone a long way toward finding who took the naval treaty. It is absurd to suppose that you have two enemies, one of whom robs you, while the other threatens your life."

"But Holmes said that he was not going to Briarbrae."

"I have known him for some time," said I, "but I never knew him do anything yet without a very good reason," and with that our conversation drifted off on to other topics.

But it was a weary day for me. Phelps was still weak after his long illness, and his misfortunes made him querulous and nervous. In vain I endeavored to interest him in Afghanistan, in India, in social questions, in anything which might take his mind out of the groove. He would always come back to his lost treaty, wondering, guessing, speculating as to what Holmes was doing, what steps Lord Holdhurst was taking, what news we should have in the morning. As the evening wore on his excitement became quite painful.

"You have implicit faith in Holmes?" he asked.

"I have seen him do some remarkable things."

"But he never brought light into anything quite so dark as this?"

"Oh, yes; I have known him solve questions which presented fewer clues than yours."

"But not where such large interests are at stake?"

"I don't know that. To my certain knowledge he has acted on behalf of three of the reigning houses of Europe in very vital matters."

"But you know him well, Watson. He is such an inscrutable fellow that I never quite know what to make of him Do you think he is hopeful? Do you think he expects to make a success of it?"

"He has said nothing."

"That is a bad sign."

"On the contrary, I have noticed that when he is off the trail he generally says so. It is when he is on a scent and is not quite absolutely sure yet it is the right one that he is most taciturn. Now, my dear fellow, we can't help matters by making ourselves nervous about them, so let me implore you to go to bed and so be fresh for whatever may await us tomorrow."

I was able at last to persuade my companion to take my advice, though I knew from his excited manner that there was not much hope of sleep for him. Indeed, his mood was infectious, for I lay tossing half the night myself, brooding over this strange problem, and inventing a hundred theories, each of which was more impossible than the last. Why had Holmes remained at Woking? Why had he asked Miss Harrison to remain in the sick room all day? Why had he been so careful not to inform the people at Briarbrae that he intended to remain near them? I cudgeled my brains until I fell asleep in the endeavor to find some explanation which would cover all these facts.

It was 7 o'clock when I awoke, and I set off at once for Phelps' room, to find him haggard and spent after a sleepless night. His first question was whether Holmes had arrived yet.

"He'll be here when he promised," said I, "and not an instant sooner or later."

And my words were true, for shortly after 8 a hansom dashed up to the door and our friend got out of it. Standing in the window we saw that his left hand was swathed in a bandage and that his face was very grim and pale. He entered the house, but it was some little time before he came upstairs.

"He looks like a beaten man," cried Phelps.

I was forced to confess that he was right. "After all," said I, "the clue of the matter lies probably here in town."

Phelps gave a groan.

"I don't know how it is," said he, "but I had hoped for so much from his return. But surely his hand was not tied up like that yesterday. What can be the matter?"

"You are not wounded, Holmes?" I asked, as my friend entered the room.

"Tut, it is only a scratch through my own clumsiness," he answered, nodding his good-mornings to us. "This case of yours, Mr. Phelps, is certainly one of the darkest which I have ever investigated."

"I feared that you would find it beyond you."

"It has been a most remarkable experience."

"That bandage tells of adventures," said I. "Won't you tell us what has happened?"

"After breakfast, my dear Watson. Remember that I have breathed thirty miles of Surrey air this morning. I suppose that there has been no answer from my cabman advertisement? Well, well, we cannot expect to score every time."

The table was all laid, and just as I was about to ring Mrs. Hudson entered with the tea and coffee. A few minutes later she brought in three covers, and we all drew up to the table, Holmes ravenous, I curious, Phelps in the gloomiest state of depression.

"Mrs. Hudson has risen to the occasion," said Holmes, uncovering a dish of curried chicken. "Her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotchwoman. What have you there, Watson?"

"Ham and eggs," I answered.

"Good! What are you going to take, Mr. Phelps—curried fowl or eggs, or will you help yourself?"

"Thank you. I can eat nothing," said Phelps.

"Oh, come! Try the dish before you."

"Thank you, I would really rather not."

"Well, then," said Holmes, with a mischevious twinkle, "I suppose that you have no objection to helping me?"

Phelps raised the cover, and as he did so he uttered a scream, and sat there staring with a face as white as the plate upon which he looked. Across the center of it was lying a little cylinder of blue-gray paper. He caught it up, devoured it with his eyes, and then danced madly about the room, pressing it to his bosom and shrieking out in his delight. Then he fell back into an arm-chair so limp and exhausted with his own emotions that we had to pour brandy down his throat to keep him from fainting.

"There! there!" said Holmes, soothingly, patting him upon the shoulder. "It was too bad to spring it on you like this, but Watson here will tell you that I can never resist a touch of the dramatic."

Phelps seized his hand and kissed it. "God bless you!" he cried. "You have saved my honor."

"Well, my own was at stake, you know," said Holmes. "I assure you it is just as hateful to me to fail in a case as it can be to you to blunder over a commission."

Phelps thrust away the precious document into the innermost pocket of his coat.

"I have not the heart to interrupt your breakfast any further, and yet I am dying to know how you got it and where it was."

Sherlock Holmes swallowed a cup of coffee, and turned his attention to the ham and eggs. Then he rose, lit his pipe, and settled himself down into his chair.

"I'll tell you what I did first, and how I came to do it afterward," said he. "After leaving you at the station I went for a charming walk through some admirable Surrey scenery to a pretty little village called Ripley, where I had my tea at an inn, and took the precaution of filling my flask and of putting a paper of sandwiches in my pocket. There I remained until evening, when I set off for Woking again, and found myself in the high road outside Briarbrae just after sunset.

"Well, I waited until the road was clear—it is never a very frequented one at any time, I fancy—and then I clambered over the fence into the grounds."

"Surely the gate was open!" ejaculated Phelps.

"Yes, but I have a peculiar taste in these matters. I chose the place where the three fir-trees stand, and behind their screen I got over without the least chance of any one in the house being able to see me. I crouched down among the bushes on the other side, and crawled from one to the other—witness the disreputable state of my trouser knees—until I had reached the clump of rhododendrons just opposite to your bedroom window. There I squatted down and awaited developments.

"The blind was not down in your room, and I could see Miss Harrison sitting there reading by the table. It was quarter past ten when she closed her book, fastened the shutters, and retired.

"I heard her shut the door, and felt quite sure that she had turned the key in the lock."

"The key!" ejaculated Phelps.

"Yes; I had given Miss Harrison instructions to lock the door on the outside and take the key with her when she went to bed. She carried out every one of my injunctions to the letter, and certainly without her co-operation you would not have that paper in your coat pocket. She departed then and the lights went out, and I was left squatting in the rhododendron-bush.

"The night was fine, but still it was a very weary vigil. Of course it has the sort of excitement about it that the sportsman feels when he lies beside the watercourse and waits for the big game. It was very long, though—almost as long, Watson, as when you and I waited in that deadly room when we looked into the little problem of the Speckled Band. There was a church clock down at Woking which struck the quarters, and I thought more than once that it had stopped. At last, however, about two in the morning, I suddenly heard the gentle sound of a bolt being pushed back and the creaking of a key. A moment later the servants' door was opened, and Mr. Joseph Harrison stepped out into the moonlight."

"Joseph!" ejaculated Phelps.

"He was bareheaded, but he had a black cloak thrown over his shoulder, so that he could conceal his face in an instant if there were any alarm. He walked on tiptoe under the shadow of the wall, and when he reached the window he worked a long-bladed knife through the sash and pushed back the catch. Then he flung open the window, and putting his knife through the crack in the shutters, he thrust the bar up and swung them open.

"From where I lay I had a perfect view of the inside of the room and of every one of his movements. He lit the two candles which stood upon the

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