

come at 12 o'clock. The professor declares that he heard the distant cry, but that he knows nothing more. He can give no explanation of the young man's last words, "The Professor—it was she," but imagines that they were the outcome of delirium. He believes that Willoughby Smith had not an enemy in the world, and can give no reason for the crime. His first action was to send Mortimer, the gardener, for the local police. A little later the chief constable sent for me. Nothing was moved before I got there, and strict orders were given that no one should walk upon the paths leading to the house. It was a splendid chance of putting your theories into practice, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. There was really nothing wanting.

"Except Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said my companion, with a somewhat bitter smile. "Well, let us hear about it. What sort of a job did you make of it?"

"I must ask you first, Mr. Holmes, to trace at this rough plan, which will give you a general idea of the position of the professor's study and the various points of the case. It will help you in following my investigation."

He unfolded the rough chart, which I here reproduce, and he laid it across Holmes' knee. I rose, and, standing behind Holmes, studied it over his shoulder.



"Yes," I said, "I can follow each of your arguments. I confess, however, I was saturated with recent rain, and you arrive at the double visit to the optician."

Holmes took the glasses in his hand. "You will perceive," he said, "that the lenses are of a peculiar shape, and of a cork to soften the pressure upon the nose. One of these is discolored and worn to some slight extent, but the other is new. Evidently one has fallen off and been replaced. I should judge that the old pair was made along the garden path and the back door, from which there is direct access to the study. Any other way would have been exceedingly complicated. The escape must have also been made along that line, for of the two other exits from the room one was blocked by Susan as she ran downstairs and the other leads straight to the professor's bedroom. I therefore directed my attention at once to the garden path, which you have traced down and some one had undoubtedly passed. It could only have been the murderer, since neither the gardener nor any one else had been there that morning and the rain had only begun during the night."

"Of course you would. Meanwhile have you anything more to tell us about the case?"

"Nothing, Mr. Holmes. I think that you know as much as I do now—probably more. We have a stranger seen quiting made as any other stranger seen in the country roads or at the railway station. We have heard of none. What beats me is the utter want of all object in the crime. Not a ghost of a motive can I any suggest."

"Ah! there I am in a position to help you. But I suppose you want us to come out to-morrow?"

"If it is not asking too much, Mr. Holmes. There's a train from Charing Cross to Chatham at 6 in the morning and we should be at Yoxley Old Place between 8 and 9."

"Then we shall take it. Your case has certainly some features of great interest, and I shall be delighted to look into it. Well, it's nearly 11, and we had best get a move on."

"I dare say you can manage all right on the sofa in front of the fire. I'll light my spirit lamp and give you a cup of coffee before we start."

"The gale had blown itself out next day, but it was a bitter morning when we started upon our journey. We saw the cold winter sun rise over the dreary marshes of the Thames and the long, sullen reaches of the river, which shone like a leaden sea under our feet."

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"Well, Wilson, any news?"

"No, sir—nothing."

"No reports of any stranger seen?"

"No, sir. Down at the station they are certain that no stranger either came or went yesterday."

"Have you had inquiries made at inns and lodgings?"

"Yes, sir; there is no one that we cannot account for."

"Well, it's only a reasonable walk to Chatham. Any one might stay there or take a train without being observed. This is the garden path of which you spoke, Mr. Holmes. I'll pledge my word there was no mark on it yesterday."

"On which side were the marks on the grass?"

"This side, sir. This narrow margin of grass between the path and the flower-bed. I can't see the traces now, but they were clear to me then."

"Yes, yes; some one has passed along," said Holmes, stooping over the flower-bed. "Our lady must have picked her steps carefully, must she not, since on the one side she would leave a track on the path, and on the other an even clearer one on the soft bed?"

"Yes, sir; she must have been a cool hand."

"I saw an intent look pass over Holmes' face."

"You say that she must have come back this way?"

"Yes, sir; there is no other."

"Of this strip of grass?"

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes."

"Hum! It was a very remarkable performance—very remarkable. Well, I think we have exhausted the path. Let us go farther. This garden door is usually kept open, I suppose? Then this visitor had nothing to do but to walk in. The idea of murder was not in her mind, or she would have provided herself with some sort of weapon, instead of having to pick this knife off the writing table. She advanced along this corridor, leaving no traces upon the cocoanut matting. Then she found herself in this study. How long was she there? We have no means of judging."

"Not more than a few minutes, sir. I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Marker, the housekeeper, had been in there tidying not very long before—about a quarter of an hour, she says."

"Well, that gives us a limit. Our lady enters this room, and what does she do? She goes over to the writing table. What for? Not for anything in the drawers. If there had been anything worth her taking, it would surely have been locked up. No, it was for some-

thing in that wooden bureau. Hallo! what is that scratch upon the face of it? Just hold a match, Watson. Why did you not tell me of this, Hopkins?"

"The mark which he was examining began upon the brasswork on the right hand side of the keyhole and extended about four inches, where it had scratched the varnish from the surface."

"I noticed it, Mr. Holmes, but you'll always find scratches round a keyhole."

"This is recent, quite recent. See how the brass shines where it is out. An old scratch would be the same color as the surface. Look at it through my lens. There's the varnish, too, like earth on each side of a furrow. Is Mrs. Marker there?"

"A sad faced, elderly woman came into the room."

"Did you dust this bureau yesterday morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice this scratch?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"I am sure you did not, for a duster would have rubbed it away long ago. Besides, the door is locked. Who has the key of this bureau?"

"The professor keeps it on his watch chain. It is a simple key."

"No, sir, it is a Chubb's key."

"Very good. Mrs. Marker, you can go. Now we are making a little progress. Our lady enters the room, advances to the bureau, and either opens the door, or she inserts the key and turns it. She is engaged, young Willoughby Smith enters the room. In her hurry to withdraw the key she makes this scratch upon the door. He seizes her, and she, in her attempt to save the optician, strikes at him with the key. The blow is a fatal one. He falls and she escapes, either with or without the object for which she has come. Is Susan, the maid, there? Could any one have got away through that door after the time that you heard the cry, Susan?"

"No, sir, it is impossible. Before I got down the stairs I had seen any one who had been in the room, and the door never opened, or I would have heard it."

"That settles his exit. Then no doubt the lady went out the way she came. I understand that this other passage that the optician had in the housekeeper's room. There is no exit that way?"

"No, sir."

"We shall go down it and make the acquaintance of the professor. Hallo, Hopkins, it is very important, very important, indeed. The professor's corridor is also lined with cocoanut matting."

"Well, sir, what of that?"

"Don't you see any bearing upon the case? Well, well, I don't insist upon it. No doubt you are right. And yet it seems to me to be suggestive. Come with me and introduce me."

"We passed down the passage, which was lined with tiny beads of cork to soften the pressure upon the nose. One of these is discolored and worn to some slight extent, but the other is new. Evidently one has fallen off and been replaced. I should judge that the old pair was made along the garden path and the back door, from which there is direct access to the study. Any other way would have been exceedingly complicated. The escape must have also been made along that line, for of the two other exits from the room one was blocked by Susan as she ran downstairs and the other leads straight to the professor's bedroom. I therefore directed my attention at once to the garden path, which you have traced down and some one had undoubtedly passed. It could only have been the murderer, since neither the gardener nor any one else had been there that morning and the rain had only begun during the night."

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