

IT WILL OUT

OR,
A GREAT MYSTERY.

"Do you mean that you are on the right track?" he asked.

"The right track? Why, sir, we have the man under lock and key."

"And his name is?"

"Arthur Charpentier, sub-lieutenant in her majesty's navy," cried Gregson, pompously, rubbing his fat hands and inflating his chest.

Shirlock Holmes gave a sigh of relief and relaxed into a smile.

"Take a seat and try one of these cigars," he said. "We are anxious to know how you managed it. Will you have some whisky and water?"

"I don't mind if I do," the detective answered. "The tremendous exertions which I have gone through during the last day or two have worn me out. Not so much bodily exertion, you understand, as the strain upon the mind. You will appreciate that, Mr. Shirlock Holmes, for we are both brain workers."

"You do me too much honor," said Holmes, gravely. "I am not a brain worker at all."

The detective seated himself in the arm-chair and pulled complacently at his cigar. Then suddenly he slapped his thigh in a paroxysm of amusement.

"The fun of it is," he cried, "that that fool Lestrade, who thinks himself so smart, has gone off upon the wrong track altogether. He is after the secretary, Stanger, who is no more to do with the crime than the babe unborn. I have no doubt that he has caught him, but he has no information."

The idea tickled Gregson so much that he laughed until he choked.

"And how did you get your clew?"

"Ah, I'll tell you all about it. Of course, Dr. Watson, this is strictly between ourselves. The first difficulty which we had to contend with was the finding of this American's antecedents. Some people would have waited until their advertisements were answered, or until parties came forward and volunteered information. That is not Tobias Gregson's way of going to work. You remember the hat beside the door?"

"Yes," said Gregson, "I remember it."

"Well, I had seen it at the residence of Mr. John Underwood & Sons, 129 Camberwell Road."

Gregson looked quite crest-fallen.

"I had no idea that you noticed it," he said. "Have you been there?"

"No."

"Ah, cried Gregson, in a relieved voice, "you noticed it by chance, however small it may seem."

"To a great mind nothing is little," remarked Holmes sententiously.

"Well, of course, sir, that there was no hat on the door, and that was no hat, but I found out that the man who had seen it, was Lieutenant Charpentier, who was on board the ship."

"That is a very good clew," said Gregson, "but it is not the only one. I have heard of the mysterious death of your late brother, Mr. John Underwood & Sons, 129 Camberwell Road."

"Smart—very smart!" murmured Sherlock Holmes.

"I next called upon Madame Charpentier," continued the detective. "I found her very much distressed. Her daughter was in the room—an uncommonly fine girl she is, too—she was looking red about the eyes, and her lips trembled with grief. That did not escape my notice. I began to smell a rat. You know the feeling, Mr. Shirlock Holmes, when you are upon the right scent of a kind of thrill in your nerves. Have you heard of the mysterious death of your late brother, Mr. John Underwood & Sons, 129 Camberwell Road?"

"The mother nodded. She didn't seem able to get out a word. The daughter burst out crying, and said more than ever that those people knew something of the matter."

"At what o'clock did Mr. Underwood leave your house for the train?" I asked.

"At eight o'clock," she said, gulping in her throat to keep down her agitation. "His secretary, Mr. Stanger, said that there were two trains—one at 9.15 and one at 11. He was to catch the first."

"And was that the last which you saw of him?"

"A terrible change came over the woman's face as I asked the question. Her features turned deadly livid, and she was some seconds before she could get out the single word 'Yes,' and when it did come it was in a husky, unnatural tone."

"There was silence for a moment, and then the daughter spoke in a calm, clear voice."

"No good can ever come of falsehood, mother," she said. "Let us be frank with this gentleman. We did see Mr. Underwood on the morning of the 15th."

"God forgive you!" cried Madame Charpentier, throwing up her hands and sinking back in her chair. "You have murdered my son, and you are here to tell me that you saw him alive!"

"Arthur would rather that we spoke the truth," the girl answered firmly.

"You had best tell me all about it now," I said. "Half confidences are no more than lies. Besides, you do not know how we know of it."

"On your head be it," cried the mother; and then, turning to me, "I will tell you all, sir. Do not imagine that my agitation on behalf of my son arises from any fear. He should have had a hand in this dreadful affair. He is utterly innocent of it. My dread is, however, that in your eyes, and in the eyes of others, he may appear to be compromised. That, however, is utterly impossible. His high character, his good name, his antecedents would all forbid it."

"Your best way is to make a clean breast of the facts," I answered. "Depend upon it, if your son is innocent he will be none the worse."

"Perhaps, Alice, you had better leave us together," she said, and her daughter withdrew. "I continued, 'I had no intention of telling you all this, but since my poor daughter has disclosed it, I have no alternative. Having heard her own story, I will tell you all without omitting any particular.'

"It is your wisest course," said I. "Mr. Underwood has been with us nearly three weeks. He and his secretary, Mr. Stanger, had been travelling on the Continent. I noticed a 'Copenhagen' label on one of his trunks, showing that he had been there last stopping-place. Stanger was a quiet, reserved man, but his employer, I am sorry to say, was very different. He was coarse in his habits and brutal in his ways. The very night of his arrival he became very much worse for drink, and, indeed, after twelve o'clock in the day he could hardly be said to be sober. His manners were disgusting and familiar. Worst of all, he speedily assumed the same attitude towards my daughter, Alice, and spoke to her more than once in a way which, fortunately, she is too innocent to understand. On one occasion he actually seized her in his arms and embraced her—in outrage which caused his own secretary to reproach him for his unmanly conduct."

"But why did you stand all that?" I asked. "I suppose that you can get rid of your boarders when you wish."

"Mrs. Charpentier blushed at my pertinent question."

"Would to God that I had given him notice on the very day he came," she said. "But it was a sore temptation. They were paying me a day each—fourteen pounds a week, and this is a slack season. I am a widow, and my boy in the navy has cost me much. I grudged to lose the money. I acted for the best. This last was too much, however, and I gave him notice the reason of his going."

"My heart grew light when I saw him drive away. My son is on leave just now, but I did not tell him anything of this, for his temper is violent and he is passionately fond of his sister. When I closed the door behind them a load seemed to be lifted from my mind. Alas! in less than an hour—"

ring at the bell, and I learned that Mr. Underwood had returned. He was excited, and evidently the worse for drink. He forced his way into the room where I was sitting with my daughter, and made some incoherent remarks about having missed his train. He then turned to Alice, and, before my very face, proposed to her that she should fly with him. "You are of age," he said. "And there is no law to stop me. I have money enough and am very spare. Never mind the old girl here, but come along with me now straight away. You shall live like a princess."

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"No doubt you are the gentleman he was expecting," they said. "He has been waiting for a gentleman for two days."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"He is upstairs in bed. He wished to be called at nine."

"It seemed to me that my sudden appearance might shake his nerves open, and beside the window, all huddled out the door, and was about to go downstairs again, when I saw something that made me feel sickish."

From under the door there crept a little red ribbon of blood, which had meandered across the passage and down the stairs, and was now lying on the floor. I followed it, and found it leading to a little pool along the skirt-drawer of the door. I opened the door, and at that moment my son Arthur came into the room. What happened then I do not know. I heard only the sound of a struggle, and then a heavy door slammed to."

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