

MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES,

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW FACE

(Continued.)

"What on earth for?" I asked.
"Oh," said she, in her playful way, "you said that you were only my banker, and bankers never ask questions, you know."
"If you really mean it, of course you shall have the money," said I.
"Oh, yes, I really mean it."
"And you won't tell me what you want it for?"

"Some day, perhaps, but not just at present, Jack."

"So, I had to be content with that, though it was the first time that there had ever been any secret between us. I gave her a check, and I never thought any more of the matter. It may have nothing to do with what came afterwards, but I thought it only right to mention it."

"Well, I told you just now that there is a cottage not far from our house. There is just a field between us, but to reach it you have to go along the road and then turn down a lane. Just beyond it is a nice little grove of Scotch pine, and I used to be very fond of strolling down there, for trees are always neighborly kind of things. The cottage had been standing empty this eight months, and it was a pity, for it was a pretty two-story place, with an old-fashioned porch and honey-suckle about it. I have stood many a time and thought what a neat little homestead it would make."

"Well last Monday evening I was taking a stroll down that way, when I met an empty man coming up the lane, and saw a pile of carpets and things lying about on the grass plot beside the porch. It was clear that the cottage had at last been let. I walked past it, and then stopping, as an idle man might, I ran my eye over it, and wondered what sort of folk they were who had come to live so near us. And as I looked I suddenly became aware that a face was watching me out of one of the upper windows."

"I don't know what there was about that face, Mr. Holmes, but it seemed to send a chill right down my back. I was some little way off, so that I could not make out the features, but there was something unnatural and inhuman about the face. That was the impression that I had, and I moved quickly forward to get a nearer view of the person who was watching me. But as I did so the face suddenly disappeared, and suddenly there it appeared to have been plucked away into the darkness of the room. I stood for five minutes thinking the business over, and trying to analyze my impressions. I could not tell if the face were that of a man or a woman. It had been too far from me for that. But

its color is what had impressed me most.

It was of a livid chalky white, and with something set and rigid about it which was shockingly unnatural. So disturbed was I that I determined to see a little more of the new inmates of the cottage. I approached and knocked at the door, which was instantly opened by a tall, gaunt woman with a harsh forbidding face."

"What may you be wanting?" she asked, in a Northern accent.

"I am your neighbor, over yonder," said I, nodding towards my house. "I see that you have only just moved in, so that I thought if I could be of any help to you in any way—"

"Ay, we'll just ask ye when we want ye," said she, and shut the door in my face. Annoyed at the churlish rebuff, I turned my back and walked home. All evening, though I tried to think of other things, my mind would still turn to the apparition at the window and the rudeness of the woman. I decided to say nothing about the former to my wife, for she is a nervous, highly strung woman, and I had no wish that she should share the unpleasant impression which had been produced upon myself. I remarked to her, however, before I fell asleep, that the cottage was now occupied, to which she returned no reply."

"I am usually an extremely sound sleeper. It has been a standing jest in the family that nothing could ever wake me during the night. And yet somehow on that particular night, whether it may have been the slight excitement produced by my little adventure or not I know not, but I slept much more lightly than usual. Half in my dreams I was dimly conscious that something was going on in the room, and gradually became aware that my wife had dressed herself and was slipping on her mantle and her bonnet. My lips were parted to murmur out some sleepy words of surprise or remonstrance at this untimely preparation, when suddenly my half-opened eyes fell upon her face, illuminated by the candle-light, and astonishment held me dumb. She wore an expression such as I had never seen before—such as I would have thought her incapable of assuming. She was deadly pale and breathing fast, glancing furtively towards the bed as she fastened her mantle, to see if she had disturbed me. Then, thinking that I was still asleep, she slipped noiselessly from the room, and an instant later I heard a sharp creaking which could only come from the hinges of the front door. I sat up in bed and rapped my knuckles against the wall to make certain that I was truly awake. Then I took my watch from under the pillow. It was three in the morning. What on earth could my wife be doing out on the country road at three in the morning?"

I had sat for about twenty minutes turning the thing over in my mind and trying to find some possible explanation. The more I thought the more extraordinary and inexplicable did it appear. I was still puzzling over it when I heard the

door gently close again, and her footsteps coming up the stairs.

"Where in the world have you been, Effie?" I asked as she entered.

"She gave a violent start and a kind of gasping cry when I spoke, and that cry and start troubled me more than all the rest, for these were something indescribably guilty about them. My wife had always been a woman of a frank, open nature, and it gave me a chill to see her sinking into her own room, and crying out and winching when her own husband spoke to her."

"You awake, Jack!" she cried, with a nervous laugh. "Why I thought that nothing could awake you."

"Where have you been?" I asked, more sternly.

"I don't wonder that you are surprised," said she, and I could see that her fingers were trembling as she undid the fastenings of her mantle. "Why, I never remember having done such a thing in my life before. The fact is that I felt as though I were choking, and had a perfect longing for a breath of fresh air. I really think that I should have fainted if I had not gone out. I stood at the door for a few minutes, and now I am quite myself again."

"All the time that she was telling me this story she never once looked in my direction, and her voice was quite unlike her usual tones. It was evident to me that she was saying what was false. I said nothing in reply, but turned my face to the wall, sick at heart, with my mind filled with a thousand venomous doubts and suspicions. What was it that my wife was concealing from me? Where had she been during that strange expedition? I felt that I should have no peace until I knew, and yet I shrank from asking her again after once she had told me what was false. All the rest of the night I tossed and tumbled, framing theory after theory, each more unlikely than the last."

"I should have gone to the city that day, but I was too disturbed in my mind to be able to pay attention to business matters. My wife seemed to be as upset as myself, and I could see from the little questioning glances which she kept shooting at me that she understood that I disbelieved her statement, and that she was at her wits' end what to do. We hardly exchanged a word during breakfast, and immediately afterwards I went out for a walk, that I might think the matter out in the fresh morning air."

"I went as far as the Crystal Palace, spent an hour in the grounds, and was back in Newbury by one o'clock. It happened that my way took me past the cottage, and I stopped for an instant to look at the windows, and to see if I could catch a glimpse of the strange face which had looked out at me on the day before. As I stood there, imagine my surprise, Mr. Holmes, when the door suddenly opened and my wife walked out."

"I was struck dumb with astonishment at the sight of her; but my emotions were nothing to those which showed themselves upon her face when our eyes met. She seemed for an instant to wish

to shrink back inside the house again, and then, seeing how useless all concealment must be, she came forward, with a very white face and frightened eyes which belied the smile upon her lips."

"Ah, Jack," she said, "I have just been in to see if I can be of any assistance to our new neighbors. Why do you look at me like that, Jack? You are not angry with me?"

"So," said I, "this is where you went during the night."

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"You came here. I am sure of it. Who are these people, that you should visit them at such an hour?"

"I have not been here before."

"How can you tell me what you know is false?" I cried. "Your very voice changes as you speak. When have I ever had a secret from you? I shall enter that cottage, and I shall probe the matter to the bottom."

"No, no, Jack, for God's sake!" she gasped, in uncontrollable emotion. Then, as I approached the door, she seized my sleeve and pulled me back with convulsive strength."

"I implore you not to do this, Jack," she cried. "I swear that I will tell you everything some day, but nothing but misery can come of it, if you enter that cottage. Then, as I tried to shake her off, she clung to me in a frenzy of entreaty."

"Trust me, Jack!" she cried. "Trust me only this once. You will never have cause to regret it. You know that I would not have a secret from you if it lives are at stake in this. If you come home with me, all will be well. If you force your way into that cottage, all is over between us."

"There was such earnestness, such despair in her manner that her words arrested me, and I stood irresolute before the door."

"I will trust you on one condition, and on one condition only," said I at last. "It is that the mystery comes to an end from now. You are at liberty to preserve your secret, but you must promise me that there shall be no more doings which are kept from my knowledge. I am willing to forget those which are passed if you promise that there shall be no more in the future."

"I was sure that you would trust me," she cried, with a great sigh of relief. "It shall be just as you wish. Come away—oh, come away up to the house."

"Still palling at my sleeve, she led me away from the cottage. As we went I glanced back, and there was that yellow livid face watching us out of the upper window. What link could there be between that creature and my wife? Or how could the coarse, rough woman whom I had seen the day before be connected with her? It was a strange puzzle, and yet I knew that my mind could never know ease again until I had solved it. (To be continued.)



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