

The Adventure of the Second Round

By Mark Wardecker

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It is with much reserve that I begin this account of the mystery which awaited my friend Sherlock Holmes and me at Sherrinsthorpe Manor in Kensington. In fact, not since recording the tragedy of the Cushing sisters have I felt such misgivings about publishing one of Holmes' cases, and in that instance, my reticence did finally prevent the story's inclusion in most subsequent anthologies. Still, the masterful way in which Holmes illuminated such an obscure conspiracy demands no less than that a record be published. Only this and the fact that the passage of time has swept away many of this drama's principal actors have moved me to finally set it down.

It was late in the month of November, and though no snow had yet fallen, the frigid blasts of winter rattled every pane and resonated in every chimney in London. During one particularly bitter morning, I arose shortly before dawn and was surprised to find my friend awake and already dressed. What was even more surprising was that, in spite of the early hour and the forbidding, slate-grey frigidity which had permeated the city, Holmes was in remarkably high spirits. He was standing in front of a roaring fire and filling his morning pipe which was comprised of all the plugs and dottles left from his smokes of the day before, all carefully dried and collected on the corner of the mantelpiece. Upon my entrance, he picked up a letter which was also on the mantelpiece and turned to greet me.

"Good morning, Watson. I am so glad you have already dressed."

"Good morning to you, as well, Holmes, but I must say that I am surprised to see you up and dressed so early."

"I was awakened about an hour ago by a messenger," he said, as he handed me the letter. "Do you remember my mentioning an Inspector Nicholson of the Yard?"

"Yes. He has called you in on a couple of cases within the past year, hasn't he?"

"Actually, he has enlisted my help on no less than three occasions. He is very young but has already made quite a name for himself in the press. He was the one who finally managed to apprehend the Spotts gang and that without my help. This time, however, he hasn't wasted an instant in contacting me which can only mean that he has stumbled upon something unusual."

At a nod toward the letter from Holmes, I unfolded it and, in my customary fashion, read it aloud:

"Sherrinsthorpe, Kensington

"3:30 a.m.

"My dear Mr. Holmes,--I should be very glad of your immediate assistance in what promises to be a most remarkable case. It is something quite in your line. So far, I have been able to keep everything as I have found it, but I beg you not to lose an

instant, as it is difficult to leave Lord Morris there.

“Yours faithfully, Geoffrey Nicholson.”

“Well, this leaves little doubt as to the result of the crime,” I remarked, “but I must confess that the name of the victim is unfamiliar to me.”

“It is to me, as well. Since Mrs. Hudson has been kind enough to prepare breakfast, why don’t you have something to eat while I look him up.”

As I sat down to breakfast at the table, Holmes retrieved a red-covered volume from one of the shelves and slumped down into his armchair. When, after several minutes, he stopped flipping through the pages and re-lit his pipe, I hazarded the question: “Well, what does it say?”

“That the victim was noble . . . not that I doubted it. No, I am afraid we shall have to begin our investigation at the scene of the crime.”

With that, I hurriedly finished Mrs. Hudson’s excellent breakfast, and in no time, we had abandoned the comfort of Baker-street for a west-bound cab. Holmes, obviously excited over the prospect of an interesting case, talked animatedly of music and the theatre, but I, uncharacteristically, became withdrawn once our growler entered High-street and the precincts of my old neighborhood. Even Hyde Park and the Gardens looked lifeless on this relentlessly cold morning, and none but the hardiest tradesmen were out and about. Within an hour, we passed through a wrought iron gate and into a long drive, at the end of which stood Sherrinsthorpe Manor, a massive red-brick mansion of three floors. As we alighted and Holmes paid the driver, a moon-faced and somewhat disheveled young man emerged from the entrance, said a couple of words to a constable posted by the door, and hurriedly walked over to us.

“Mr. Holmes, I’m so glad you decided to accept my invitation!” he said smiling.

“It is good to see you, as well, Nicholson. This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson.”

“It’s good to finally meet you, sir. I hate to rush you both, but we should probably have a look at the scene before the coroner arrives to examine the body.”

“That’s fine, but let me first congratulate you on the birth of your child,” said Holmes, causing Nicholson to suddenly turn around again.

“Thank you. Our son Adam was born a few weeks ago. Did Inspector Lestrade tell you?” asked Nicholson with a hint of expectation in his tone.

“No, there are several other indicators. In fact, when I first noticed the wrinkled condition of your suit and that you looked unusually weary, even for one aroused so early, I began to worry that your domestic fortunes had suffered a decline. However, once you turned, exposing the dried milk stain upon your left shoulder, I was glad to find that quite the opposite was true.”

“Let’s hope Mr. Holmes can make such short work of this murder, Dr. Watson.

Follow me, gentlemen.”

And with that, we entered the main hall.

“You will probably want to keep your coats on,” warned Nicholson. “As I stated in the letter, nothing has been touched, and the French doors of the study have been open all night.”

Indeed, it was absolutely freezing in Lord Morris’ study, and I was able to feel a blast of wind the moment Nicholson opened its door which was on the left-hand side of the hall. The French doors were directly across from the entrance, and the only other window, which was closed, was on our left and looked out upon the grounds in front of the mansion. Despite its rifled appearance, the room was neatly furnished, with some scattered Persian rugs, a few armchairs before the fireplace, and a large mahogany desk interposed between the entrance and the French doors. And it was here that Lord Morris sat with his head resting upon the desk’s bloodstained blotter. Also upon the desk lay a small pistol, directly in front of his right hand. The man’s hunched but tall form still retained its frock-coat with only a pair of black, patent leather slippers indicating that his day’s exertions were coming to an end.

“Does that gun belong to Lord Morris, Inspector?”

“Yes, according to the butler, Mr. Holmes. It appears to be unfired.”

Holmes leaned over and glanced into the gun’s barrel. Then, with a nod from Nicholson, he picked it up and began to examine it.

“It is a .41 rimfire, single-shot, Colt derringer. How closely did you examine it, Nicholson?”

“Again, Mr. Holmes, I refrained from picking it up, knowing that you would want to see the room exactly as it was.”

“That and the wind would account for the error, for it has, in fact, been fired recently. It is obviously a second round which is undischarged,” he said, handing the gun to Nicholson.

“Yes, you’re right. I can smell the powder.”

“What do you make of the wound, Watson?”

I looked down upon a middle-aged profile that had once been quite dashing but was now pale and expressionless and replied, “It is obvious from the burns around its rim that it had to have been inflicted at very close range. In all honesty, Holmes, I would probably have taken this for a suicide, if it weren’t for the gun’s being loaded. Lord Morris’ death would have been instantaneous. The wound seems consistent with this pistol, but until the bullet is retrieved from the skull, it is impossible to say for sure that it is the murder weapon. I assume there is no need to infer the time of death?”

“No,” said Nicholson. “Perkins, the butler, heard the shot at approximately 12:45 a.m. and entered the room moments after.”

“He saw no intruder?”

“No, Mr. Holmes.”

“What about all of these papers lying about? Is there anything of any significance?” asked Holmes, as he stooped the look at them.

“Quite possibly there is something significant which is missing, but those I have seen are nothing but household bills.”

“Yes. Here is one for coal, for gas, the green grocer’s.”

“Holmes! There’s an appointment book under this armchair,” I cried. “It appears the pages corresponding to the past four days have been torn out.”

“Excellent, Watson! Why don’t you and Nicholson examine the rest of it, while I have a look around.”

“Good luck, Holmes. The ground is as hard as a rock out there,” replied Nicholson.

Actually, I had almost been able to forget the cold while we were busy in our investigations, but now, I was grateful when Holmes, crawling around on all fours behind the desk, finally made his way onto the patio and closed the French doors behind him. While Nicholson and I paged through Lord Morris’ appointment book, I would glance up occasionally to see how Holmes progressed in his search, crawling upon the frozen ground outside, in ever-widening semi-circles. When he returned, I could have sworn he had found some clue.

“What did you find, Holmes?” I asked.

“Nothing whatever,” he replied with an odd note of triumph in his voice.

“How does your research progress?”

“I told you that you wouldn’t find anything out there,” said Nicholson.

“There’s very little of interest in here, --mostly Parliamentary meetings and lunch dates with his Bagatelle Club companions. It’s all rather pedestrian.”

“With whom was the last appointment?”

“His wife,” I answered, “for their anniversary dinner.”

“I see. May I have a look at it, please?”

Holmes flipped through the book for some time without expressing an interest in any of the entries and then handed it back to the inspector.

“Thank you. I think I am finished with this room for now. Would it be possible for me to interview the rest of the household, Inspector?”

“Certainly. I have already done some preliminary questioning, and it seems that, since only Lady Morris and the butler were in the central part of the house, only they heard a shot. The other servants were asleep in the wings and have been able to add nothing to the account.”

“Then it is to Lady Morris and the butler I would speak. Before we go, however, have you been able to determine who benefits directly from the lord’s death?”

“Lady Morris has already been kind enough to show me Lord Morris’ will,

Holmes. She and their only daughter are the two principal heirs, but I would add that, as things stand, these two ladies are already quite well off.”

“Excellent work, Nicholson,” commented Holmes, as the inspector led us to the sitting room where Lady Morris was waiting. She was an elegant and stately woman, only just beginning to approach middle-age and dressed in a rather simple, black dress. Though she had obviously been crying, she had regained her composure enough to speak and, at Nicholson’s request, dispatched her maid in order to fetch Perkins, the butler. After the introductions, Holmes took a seat in the chair opposite the one in which she sat and assumed his most comforting tone.

“Madam, you do us a great kindness in agreeing to speak with us, and I promise I shall be as brief as possible.”

“Mr. Holmes, I shall answer as many questions as you like, if they should aid you in catching my husband’s killer.”

“Thank you. Lady Morris, could you please recount the events of last night, omitting nothing, no matter how seemingly insignificant.”

“Yes. I had retired early, before my husband had returned from his club, in fact, and awoke to a loud noise. I heard a door open and close in the hall below and began to hurriedly dress myself. Upon lighting the lamp beside the bed, I noticed that the time was approximately 12:45. Within a few minutes, I descended the stairs and saw Perkins stepping out of the room. I could tell from the expression on his face that something was horribly wrong. Perkins’ family has been attached to my husband for three generations, and I know him almost as well as I know anyone. He tried to stop me from entering, but I forced my way over the threshold. I saw my lifeless husband slumped over his desk and immediately fainted. After summoning the maid to take care of me, Perkins called the police from the telephone in the hall.”

“Lady Morris, are you positive that you heard only one shot?” asked Holmes.

“A loud noise woke me up, and I heard Perkins enter the study. If there were any sounds before those, I slept through them.”

“How long an interval had passed between your waking and your descending the stairs?”

“I did not look at the clock again, but it could have been no more than two minutes.”

“Did you notice anything about the state of the room when you entered it?”

“I noticed several papers lying upon the floor and that the French doors behind my husband’s desk were wide open.”

“The derringer in the study,--did it belong to your husband?”

“Yes. My husband was never fond of hunting. It was the only gun in the house.”

“Which club did your husband attend that evening?”

“The only club he ever attended: the Bagatelle Club, in Regent-street. He

loved both cards and billiards.”

“You have a daughter?”

“Yes, she is married to an American railroad owner and lives in San Francisco. She is pregnant with our first grandchild.”

“With your permission, Lady Morris, I would like to ask you some more general questions. Can you think of anyone who would want to kill your husband?”

“My husband’s affairs were largely his own, but no, I can think of no one. There was, however, some one unknown to me.”

“Pray, continue,” Holmes said, as he leaned forward, steepling the tips of his fingers.

“Three days ago, on Wednesday evening, I was passing my husband’s study on my way to the stairs, and I heard him speaking with another man. I could not make out what was being said, but my husband was definitely talking to someone whose voice I had never heard before. I thought this odd, as no visitor had called upon us, so I entered the dining room beside the study and kept watch at the window, waiting for the stranger to appear. I assumed he had entered the study through the French doors, since he hadn’t rung at the front door. I was confirmed in this a few minutes later when a tall man, wearing a black overcoat and a broad-brimmed hat, emerged on to the patio. I had never seen him before, but he was about your height, with a full beard and a slight limp. I am sorry that I cannot tell you more, but it was too dark.

“After that meeting, my husband was a changed man. He did not come to bed that night or any succeeding night, for that matter. I couldn’t get more than a few words out of him at a time, and once, when I looked in upon him in his study, he looked as though he had been weeping. The only excuse he would give was that he was concerned over a friend of his at the club, Sampson, I believe, who was gravely ill. This was all he offered, and most of the time, I could barely make eye-contact with him.”

“I am sorry,” said Holmes. “I have only one more question. Do you remember at what time you came across your husband’s meeting with this stranger?”

“Yes, it was almost 9:30 when he left.”

“Thank you, Lady Morris. I shall let you know as soon as I have any information.”

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson,” said Lady Morris, as she and her maid left the room. “Please let me know if I can provide you with anything further.”

As soon as she departed, the butler entered the sitting-room. He was slim and in his fifties, with long and graying sideburns.

“Hello, Perkins. I am Mr. Sherlock Holmes and this is Dr. Watson. I have just a few questions for you.”

“I shall try my best to answer them, sir,” replied the butler.

“What were you doing when you heard the shot?”

“I was at the other end of the hall, making sure all of the candles and lamps had been extinguished when I heard it.”

“You heard only one shot?”

“Yes, sir, and I hurried to the study as quickly as I could. I was sure the sound had come from there.”

“At what time had Lord Morris come home that evening?”

“Around midnight, sir. He went directly to his study without saying a word.”

“At what time did you hear the shot?”

“When I passed the grandfather clock in the hall, it was 12:45.”

“When you entered the study, you found it just as it is now?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You saw no intruder?”

“None, sir, but I was slow to act, on account of the shock. It took me a moment to walk over to the French doors.”

“Perkins, why did you close the door behind you when you entered Lord Morris’ study?”

“I didn’t, Mr. Holmes. The wind blew it shut.”

“Thank you, Perkins. That will be all for now.”

Perkins opened the door for us, and our trio re-entered the hall. Holmes turned once more to Perkins and asked, “Would it be possible for you to call Dr. Watson and I a cab, please.”

However, Lady Morris immediately appeared at the banister and called down, “Nonsense, our driver shall convey you to your lodgings. Perkins, please get Boggis.”

After thanking Lady Morris, Holmes, Inspector Nicholson, and I discussed the case outside, while waiting for the coach.

“What do you make of it, Holmes? Was Lord Morris shot with his own gun?”

“So it would appear, Watson. You will telegraph, Inspector, when you know for certain?”

“Of course.”

“Holmes, why would the killer load a second round into the gun?” I asked.

“It is much too soon to speculate. Perhaps the killer didn’t,” said Holmes, with the faintest trace of a grin forming upon his face.

“Nonsense, who else would have done it?” shot back, Nicholson. “It could be that the murderer was trying to make it appear as though a different gun had been used, in order to deflect suspicion from someone within the household. After all, only someone familiar with the house could have found the gun.”

“There is a germ of a sound theory in that statement, Inspector. The gun and the room’s appearance are definitely meant to deflect suspicion.”

“I take it you are referring to the room’s being rifled?” I asked.

“Yes, Watson. It is suggestive.”

“How so, Holmes?” asked Nicholson.

“An intruder could have had but a minute in which to work, before Perkins entered.”

“That affirms my theory that it was an inside job,--the killer knew where to find the papers he wanted,” Nicholson interjected.

“In any event,” I ventured, “I think suspicion rests squarely upon this man in the broad-brimmed hat. Find him, and you’ll find your killer.”

“Yes, Watson. Once we have this stranger’s identity, we shall have solved this case.”

“Well Holmes, if you have no objections, after I consult with the coroner, I am going to start questioning some of the people in this address book.”

“Very good, Nicholson. Watson and I will visit the Bagatelle Club. I shall contact you, if anything develops.”

By this time, Boggis had already arrived with the coach. Before Holmes had given him directions, he asked my friend if he was Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Once Holmes had affirmed this, Boggis began to draw closer and speak confidentially.

“Mr. Holmes, sir, there is something that has been troubling me about the master, but I’m not sure if it’s something I should mention to the mistress.”

“Go on, Boggis.”

“You see, sir, I’m the one what always drives his lordship to the club, and sometimes, his lordship asks me to pick up some of his friends, as well. Lately, not Lord Morris, but a couple of these friends have been mentioning something peculiar,--a ‘Bagatelle Shakespeare Society’. But they always sound real smarmy when they say it, like lechers in a dancehall. Now I’m no better than any other bloke, but it seems to me that these two friends had some kind of corrupting influence on his lordship. Does any of this help you, Mr. Holmes?”

“Yes, Boggis. Tell me, had you ever driven Lord Morris and these friends to any destination other than the Bagatelle Club?”

“No, sir. Just heard ‘em talk is all.”

“Thank you, Boggis.”

Holmes said hardly a word on our drive back to Baker-street. I knew better than to interrupt my friend during such spells of silence, for he would undoubtedly reveal all at the appropriate time. Our trip was, therefore, rather monotonous, except for a quick stop at the post office, so Holmes could send a telegram. When we finally arrived at 221b, Holmes tipped Boggis most generously, and we ascended to our rooms, Holmes to await a response to his telegram and I to await the lunch which Mrs. Hudson was preparing. After I had eaten, Holmes having elected to instead consume a heroic amount of shag for lunch, I sat down in my armchair and rested my legs upon an ottoman heaped with cushions, for the cold had been bothering my old wound terribly. It was just after I had finally gotten comfortable when two telegrams

arrived for Holmes.

“Ah, the first one is from Inspector Nicholson, confirming that Lord Morris’ derringer did, indeed, fire the fatal shot. The second is from the Earl of Maynooth.”

“The father of Ronald Adair? Is he back in England?”

“He has been back for some time, Watson, and has agreed to meet with us, at the Bagatelle Club. Perhaps he will be able to shed some light upon the affairs of Lord Morris.”

Once again, we hailed a four-wheeler and were soon on our way to Regent-street. It was still quite gloomy and cold, but at least the wind had finally died, making our trip somewhat more comfortable. As we approached our destination, I felt a wave of nostalgia as I gazed upon the white façade of the Criterion Bar, for it was there that I first heard mention of Holmes, an event which changed dramatically the trajectory of my life. There was little time for reminiscing, though, for we had soon reached our destination. Upon entering the club, a small, elderly man in the most neatly pressed suit I had ever seen began leading us past table upon table of cigar chewing nobility, all enjoying their games and their brandy.

“Once again, we are moving in high life, Watson,” quipped Holmes with a sly smile.

We then arrived at a comfortable, oak-paneled alcove where sat an ample-framed, florid-faced gentleman whom I took to be the Earl of Maynooth.

“Hello, Mr. Holmes. And Dr. Watson, it is so good to finally meet you. Too bad about Lord Morris; terrible business that. I shall do what I can to help, but I must admit that I did not know the man terribly well. Please, take a seat,” he said, indicating two sumptuous leather armchairs. After Holmes and I had accepted and lit the cigars our host had offered to us, Holmes addressed the earl.

“I realise, sir, that you were not close to Lord Morris, but was it his custom to stay here until late in the evening?”

“Why Mr. Holmes, I, myself, no longer keep very late hours, so I could not positively answer your question.”

“Lady Morris said her husband spent a great deal of his time here, but another source of mine intimated that he may have been here less frequently than she thought. Would you, by any chance, know anything about that?”

“Lord knows I have enough trouble keeping track of my own affairs and could not possibly be expected to keep tabs on a veritable stranger. I do know, however, that the lord and a few of his friends were rather fond of the ladies, Mr. Holmes.”

“Yes, that is the very thing about which I need to know more.”

“I am afraid I do not know much more than that. Besides, it is not fitting for a man of my position to engage in such cheap gossip.”

“I understand, sir, but I am afraid that, to find out what happened to the late lord, I must press the issue. What was the Bagatelle Shakespeare Society?”

“Not so loud, man. And do not think for a moment that I would ever forget the service you and Dr. Watson performed for my family in risking both of your own lives to apprehend my son’s murderer. I would not miss any opportunity to help you, but I must be discreet. Lord Morris and two of his friends, whose names I will provide to you should it become absolutely necessary, liked to prowl the theatres of the West End in search of conquests. The practice started when the lord met an actress at the Burbage Theatre by the name of Cecilia Benson. He was quite fond of her and went to see her regularly. She then introduced some of her friends to Lord Morris’ companions. Since all of the men are married, they would usually come here first and then depart for the Burbage later in the evening.”

“Thank you, sir. You have been a tremendous help. Tell me, before we go, how is Sampson getting on?”

“I am afraid I know of no one by that name. Is he a member?”

“Evidently not. Sorry, my mistake. Come, Watson. We must get to the theatre before it opens for the evening. Hopefully, we will have time for a word with Miss Benson.”

“*Mrs. Benson, Mr. Holmes,*” the earl corrected. “Cecilia Benson is married, as well.”

A short time later, Holmes and I, after another silent cab ride, found ourselves in the Strand before the Burbage Theatre. According to the signs out front, Cecilia Benson was appearing as Volumnia in *Coriolanus*. We made our way through the large, richly carpeted lobby, the walls of which were lined with caryatides of gilded plaster, to the manager’s office. At our knock, a small, rather high-strung man emerged, and we introduced ourselves.

“It is a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Holmes. To what do I owe the honour?”

“It is imperative that I speak to one of your actresses, a Mrs. Cecilia Benson.”

“Indeed, I too would like to speak with her, for you see, she’s been missing for the last four days.”

“Holmes, that corresponds with the missing pages of the appointment book!” I said.

“You wouldn’t happen to know who saw her last?” queried Holmes.

“Well, sir, that would probably be me. On Tuesday afternoon, I was gazing out of my window at a strange carriage I had noticed which was parked in front of the theatre. Within moments of my turning to look outside, I saw Cecilia walking towards the carriage with a man. They climbed inside, and off they went. I’ve been making do with her understudy, ever since.”

“Could you describe the man who accompanied her?”

“I didn’t get a good look at his face, but he was quite tall and walked with a pronounced limp.”

“Was he wearing a broad-brimmed hat?”

“Why yes, Dr. Watson. He was.”

“What was it about the carriage that struck you as odd?” Holmes resumed.

“It was the insignia upon the side,--a cross, in front of which was something resembling a fluttering sheet of linen. Over this, were the initials ‘St. V.’.”

“Holmes, there was a man named St. Vincent listed in the appointment book!”

“Thank you, Watson. Sir, would it be possible to see Mrs. Benson’s dressing room? It might help me to find her whereabouts.”

“Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Follow me.”

The dressing room was fairly small, its large dressing table taking up most of the space. Amongst the make-up and brushes littering this was a small notebook which Holmes immediately began to examine.

“Watson, there is a page missing.”

Holmes then produced a charcoal stick from his pocket and began lightly rubbing the right-hand page which would have lain beneath the missing one. In this way, he was able to reveal the following faint message:

“My Darling,

“I am to be admitted this afternoon. Please come.”

Holmes then searched the rest of the tiny room but revealed nothing further. Finally, we took our leave, Holmes promising to contact the theatre manager, if he found the missing actress. Before returning to Baker-street, Holmes dropped into a post office to send two telegrams. In the cab, on our way home, I could remain patient no longer.

“Homes, what can it all mean?”

“Surely, Watson, a man of your background should have no problem finding our fugitive actress’ location.”

“All I can make of it is that she is to gain admittance somewhere with someone who might possibly be named St. Vincent.”

“Come now, Watson. The note says nothing of ‘gaining admittance’ but of being ‘admitted’. Surely, that would suggest something to someone such as yourself.”

“Well, in my profession, one is usually ‘admitted’ to a hospital.”

“Precisely. Now, let’s assume that ‘St. V.’ does not stand for the name of an individual.”

“I’m sorry, Holmes, but I don’t follow.”

“The cross, the linen, ‘St. V.’,--surely that would indicate St. Veronica.”

“St. Veronica’s Hospital for Women! Of course.”

“Yes, Watson. I have just sent a telegram to them, asking if Mrs. Benson is a patient and if we can pay a visit tomorrow morning.”

“To whom did you send the second telegram?”

“To our good friend, Nicholson, apprising him of our progress.”

It was already dark when we arrived back in Baker-street, and I was relieved

when Holmes decided to join me for dinner. That night, I fell asleep to the melancholy strains of Holmes violin and did not re-awake until some time after dawn. When I entered our sitting room, Mrs. Hudson was already setting our breakfast upon the table, and Holmes was reading the paper.

“Good morning, Watson. Have a seat. There should be ample time for breakfast before we resume our investigation.”

“You certainly are in a good mood, Holmes.”

“I have just heard from a Dr. Smythe, at St. Veronica’s. Mrs. Benson is, indeed, a patient there, and we are free to visit her at any time after eleven o’clock. I expect this meeting will go a long way in establishing a motive for our case.”

“Does that mean you know who killed Lord Morris?”

“My dear Watson, I have known that since yesterday morning.”

“But who?”

“All in good time. I must satisfy myself upon a few more points, before I can be absolutely certain of events. Would you like to have a look at today’s paper? It contains an account of what we saw yesterday at Sherrinsthorpe.”

After breakfast, we departed for the East End. It was there, in the City, that we found the rather ugly pile of a structure known as St. Veronica’s Hospital for Women. It was, in reality, more of a mental asylum than a traditional hospital, and its sterile, white, arched corridors reverberated with the screams and moans of its imprisoned Bedlamites. Dr. Smythe, a rather shabby looking bald man with a flaming orange beard, was leading us through a throng of black and white uniformed nurses to the room of Cecilia Benson.

“Here we are, gentlemen, but I must warn you that my patient may not be of much help to you,” he said as he swung open the room’s heavy door.

Even with no make-up and dressed in a shabby white hospital gown, Cecilia Benson was a stunningly beautiful woman. Her flawless, milk-white skin was emphasized by her long, black hair, and her movements were still incredibly graceful, reflecting her several years upon the stage. Yet, when I looked at her eyes, I noticed a vacancy in their gaze, and I could also detect a slight slackness about the mouth.

“Oh, Smythe, you have brought me company, and a handsome pair they are,” she said, touching Holmes’ arm.

He did not attempt to hide his distaste and quickly brushed it away. “Mrs. Benson, I would like to ask you some questions about Lord Morris.”

“He is dead and gone; at his head a grass green turf, at his heels a stone,” she rambled.

“I take it, then, that you know what has happened. Do you have any idea why?”

“As if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors, he comes before me,” she said as she turned to me and placed her hand on my leg. Like Holmes, I deflected

it but, admittedly, with a greater reluctance.

“Mrs. Benson,” resumed Holmes, “can you tell me anything of your husband?”

“I was the more deceived,” she said sadly. “There’s fennel for you, and columbine; there’s a rue for you; and here’s some for me.”

“O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown,” said Holmes in frustration while turning to leave.

“You are a good chorus, my lord,” replied Mrs. Benson, and as we left, she began to sing:

“For to see mad Tom of Bedlam

“Ten thousand miles I traveled

“Mad Maudlin goes on dirty toes

“To save her shoes from gravel.”

Once outside the door, I made my diagnosis, “Dr. Smythe, it appears Mrs. Benson is suffering from syphilis.”

“That is correct, Dr. Watson. She admitted herself on Tuesday and has very rapidly deteriorated.”

“You say she admitted herself? There was no one with her?”

“No, Mr. Holmes. She mentioned that her physician had referred her to us but, upon questioning, could not seem to recall his name.”

“Thank you for all of your help, Dr. Smythe.”

While we were walking back to our cab, Holmes began to speak.

“Watson, we must have the name of that doctor.”

“The one who gave the referral.”

“Yes, if you could call it that. Would it be possible for you to find out the identity of Lord Morris’ physician?”

“I imagine I could make a quick stop over at Bart’s and see if any of my colleagues know anything.”

“Excellent, Watson. We shall drop you off there, first. I have some business to attend to back in the West End. Remember, get as much information as possible, and meet me back in Baker-street, before supper.”

As we agreed, late that afternoon, I returned triumphantly to Baker-street. Holmes was already seated in his armchair with his feet propped-up on the fender before the fireplace.

“Good afternoon, Watson. How did you fare?”

“Holmes, Lord Morris’ doctor’s name is Edmund Samuels. He has offices in Wimpole-street and was in a riding accident two years ago, causing him to walk with a pronounced limp! Here is his address.”

“Brilliant, Watson! You have outdone yourself!”

“It is just as you have said, Holmes: ‘When a doctor does go wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge.’ It now looks to me like this is

all simply a failed attempt at blackmail. But Holmes, where are you going?"

"I have to send one more telegram, Watson. I expect developments. Go ahead and have supper without me. There is no need to wait on my account."

Indeed, Holmes ate nothing that night and shunned sleep, as well. The next morning, I perceived him dimly through a fog of tobacco smoke. He was smoking impatiently, obviously awaiting a reply to the telegram he had sent the previous evening. It arrived shortly after breakfast.

"Watson, I must leave to notify Nicholson and Lady Morris that we shall meet them at Sherrinsthorpe Manor this afternoon. It is at that time that I will clear up this matter for them. You will accompany me, I presume."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. But really, Holmes, you must eat something."

My entreaty fell on deaf ears, however, and I was left to finish my breakfast in solitude. Later, that afternoon, Holmes, Inspector Nicholson, Lady Morris, Perkins, and I once again found ourselves in the sitting room of Sherrinsthorpe Manor, and everyone but Holmes took a seat.

"Mr. Holmes, am I to understand that you have, in fact, solved this case?"

"There are but two points which I need to clarify. The first and most pressing of which is how you managed to procure the second derringer round so soon after discovering the body, Perkins."

The butler practically leaped out of his chair and exclaimed, "Surely, Mr. Holmes, you don't think I killed Lord Morris?"

"Nothing of the sort, Perkins, and please, resume your seat. Why don't I reconstruct the events of the evening, as I believe they occurred, and you can fill in the gaps for me when I have finished.

"After you heard the shot, it could have taken you no more than forty-five seconds to reach the room. This event could not have been totally unexpected by you, and you will also have to explain to me how you knew what had driven Lord Morris to suicide. It is obvious to me, however, that you did know, because you managed to rearrange the room so quickly, obscuring what had really happened. You entered the room and closed the door behind you, for if the wind had been strong enough to blow that door shut, it would have also created a larger mess within than what was there when we examined it. Somehow, you found a second round for the gun, and with that came your idea. You reloaded the weapon and replaced it, wiping the powder marks from the lord's hand. To minimize the chance of anyone's noticing the odour of the discharged weapon, you opened the French doors which also made it look as though an imaginary intruder had used them. From the appointment book, you quickly removed the pages which would have scandalized Lord Morris, and it was this which prompted you to create the illusion of the room's being rifled by the imaginary killer. After scattering a few papers from that cabinet, you reopened the

door and waited for Lady Morris to appear which would have been moments later. Am I correct so far?"

Perkins nodded in bewilderment, while Lady Morris sobbed.

"But, Perkins, why?" she cried.

"Madam, Perkins was acting out of a misguided sense of loyalty. However, I am afraid I must point out that Lord Morris' present behaviour deserved no such fidelity or respect. In truth, Lady Morris, he has used you horribly. Of late, Lord Morris had become romantically involved with an actress. Unfortunately, as I found out yesterday, she, too, had been the victim of a husband with a roving eye, and from him, she had contracted a *morbus venerius*. She, in turn, passed this disease on to your husband who, unable to cope with the shame, decided to take his own life."

"He's right, Lady Morris. I came upon the lord, weeping in his study on Thursday. He tried to compose himself and mentioned an ailing friend, but when I observed the doctor's bill upon his desk, he broke down and confessed everything to me. Essentially, he and I grew up together, and I suppose, at that moment, he had to confide in someone. It was also at that time that I noticed the derringer in a drawer of his desk. I had never seen it before, so naturally, I thought the worst. Later that evening, I returned to the study and removed the bullet from the breech of the gun, putting it in a pocket of my frock-coat. I knew it wasn't my place to do so, but I hoped that, if Lord Morris knew that I had figured out his intention, somehow, it might deter him. The following night, when I heard the shot, I knew immediately what had happened. As I walked down the hall, I reached into my pocket for a key to the study, in case it should have been necessary, and I found the bullet. The rest is as Mr. Holmes said, though I have no idea how he could have known it. Please, Lady Morris, you must understand that I was simply trying to protect Lord Morris."

"At great risk to the health of Lady Morris," chided Holmes.

"Holmes, how did you know it was a suicide?" asked the inspector.

"As Dr. Watson said, the posture of the body and the wound were all consistent with suicide. Why would a killer want to make a crime scene which looks exactly like a suicide look like that of a murder? Also, there was no sign of an intruder. As I said before, how could the butler come into the room within one minute of the shot's being fired and not have discovered the killer going through the appointment book or the cabinets? There really weren't terribly many papers lying about on the floor, but to a butler, it would seem like this degree of dishevelment was consistent with a robbery of some sort. No, Nicholson, only the body seemed to be undisturbed. All else seemed rearranged, and there was only one person we knew of who would have had the opportunity to alter the room's appearance. Given all this, all I had to do was discover the reason for the suicide. This proved more time-consuming than I had anticipated."

"What about the man in the broad-brimmed hat?"

“That, Nicholson, was Lord Morris’ physician, Dr. Edmund Samuels. According to this telegram I received today, he had come here on Wednesday to examine Lord Morris. He has promised to contact you, as well, Lady Morris, tomorrow.”

“Well, I suppose I must now decide how to proceed in the matter.”

“Inspector Nicholson, as you and several of your colleagues have already learned, your career can only benefit from working with me from time to time and by placing the utmost trust in my conclusions. However, just because *I*, who am in no way connected with the official police, have come to this particular conclusion does not mean that you, *Inspector*, are in any way officially obliged to accept or act upon it.”

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes. I shall take that under consideration.”

Privileging honour over self-advancement, Nicholson never did officially solve the murder of Lord Morris, a momentary setback in a career which would soon be redeemed by many successes. At that moment, however, Holmes and I were still unsure of the outcome. It was already growing dark as we made our way home, and outside our cab, a wind had begun to blow from the east, and the snow had finally begun to fall.