

ADVENTURE 10 ❖ THE NAVAL TREATY, PART 2

❖ *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* ❖

It was twenty past three when we reached our terminus, and after a hasty luncheon at the buffet we pushed on at once to Scotland Yard. Holmes had already wired to Forbes, and we found him waiting to receive us—a small, foxy man with a sharp but by no means amiable expression. He was decidedly frigid in his manner to us, especially when he heard the errand upon which we had come.

“I’ve heard of your methods before now, Mr. Holmes,” said he, tartly. “You are ready enough to use all the information that the police can lay at your disposal, and then you try to finish the case yourself and bring discredit on them.”

“On the contrary,” said Holmes, “out of my last fifty-three cases my name has only appeared in four, and the police have had all the credit in forty-nine. I don’t blame you for not knowing this, for you are young and inexperienced, but if you wish to get on in your new duties you will work with me and not against me.”

“I’d be very glad of a hint or two,” said the detective, changing his manner. “I’ve certainly had no credit from the case so far.”

“What steps have you taken?”

“Tangey, the commissionnaire, has been shadowed. He left the Guards with a good character and we can find nothing against him. His wife is a bad lot, though. I fancy she knows more about this than appears.”

“Have you shadowed her?”

“We have set one of our women on to her. Mrs. Tangey drinks, and our woman has been with her twice when she was well on, but she could get nothing out of her.”

“I understand that they have had brokers in the house?”

“Yes, but they were paid off.”

“Where did the money come from?”

“That was all right. His pension was due. They have not shown any sign of being in funds.”

“What explanation did she give of having answered the bell when Mr. Phelps rang for the coffee?”

“She said that he husband was very tired and she wished to relieve him.”

“Well, certainly that would agree with his being found a little later asleep in his chair. There is nothing against them then but the woman’s character. Did you ask her why she hurried away that night? Her haste attracted the attention of the police constable.”

“She was later than usual and wanted to get home.”

“Did you point out to her that you and Mr. Phelps, who started at least twenty minutes after her, got home before her?”

“She explains that by the difference between a ‘bus and a hansom.”

“Did she make it clear why, on reaching 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 a 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 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 luxuriant lounges on either side of the fireplace. Standing on the rug between us, with his slight, tall figure, his 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 your 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. Phelps 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.”

“Any 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 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 to-day, 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 to-morrow, 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 centre 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 two 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 now. 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’s 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 single,” 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 stopped 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 trades-people. 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 the wood was hanging down. Holmes pulled it off and examined it critically.

“Do 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 to-night?”

“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’s suggestion. What the object of my friend’s manoeuvres 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 to-night, 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 to-morrow. 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 to-morrow 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 station.

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 house-breaker’s 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 towards 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 misfortune 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 that 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 to-morrow.”

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 cudgelled my brains until I fell asleep in the endeavor to find some explanation which would cover all these facts.

It was seven o’clock when I awoke, and I set off at once for Phelps’s 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 eight 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, and 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 Scotch-woman. What have you here, 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 mischievous 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 centre 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, soothing, patting him upon the shoulder. “It was too bad to spring it on you like this, but Watson here will tell you that I never can 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 afterwards,” 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 cooperation 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 water-course 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 bare-headed, but he had a black coat 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 mantelpiece, and then he proceeded to turn back the corner of the carpet in the neighborhood of the door. Presently he stopped and picked out a square piece of board, such as is usually left to enable plumbers to get at the joints of the gas-pipes. This one covered, as a matter of fact, the T joint which gives off the pipe which supplies the kitchen underneath. Out of this hiding-place he drew that little cylinder of paper, pushed down the board, rearranged the carpet, blew out the candles, and walked straight into my arms as I stood waiting for him outside the window.

“Well, he has rather more viciousness than I gave him credit for, has Master Joseph. He flew at me with his knife, and I had to grasp him twice, and got a cut over the knuckles, before I had the upper hand of him. He looked murder out of the only eye he could see with when we had finished, but he listened to reason and gave up the papers. Having got them I let my man go, but I wired full particulars to Forbes this morning. If he is quick enough to catch his bird, well and good. But if, as I shrewdly suspect, he finds the nest empty before he gets there, why, all the better for the government. I fancy that Lord Holdhurst for one, and Mr. Percy Phelps for another, would very much rather that the affair never got as far as a police-court.

“My God!” gasped our client. “Do you tell me that during these long ten weeks of agony the stolen papers were within the very room with me all the time?”

“So it was.”

“And Joseph! Joseph a villain and a thief!”

“Hum! I am afraid Joseph’s character is a rather deeper and more dangerous one than one might judge from his appearance. From what I have heard from him this morning, I gather that he has lost heavily in dabbling with stocks, and that he is ready to do anything on earth to better his fortunes. Being an absolutely selfish man, when a chance presented itself he did not allow either his sister’s happiness or your reputation to hold his hand.”

Percy Phelps sank back in his chair. “My head whirls,” said he. “Your words have dazed me.”

“The principal difficulty in your case,” remarked Holmes, in his didactic fashion, “lay in the fact of there being too much evidence. What was vital was overlaid and hidden by what was irrelevant. Of all the facts which were presented to us we had to pick just those which we deemed to be essential, and then piece them together in their order, so as to reconstruct this very remarkable chain of events. I had already begun to suspect Joseph, from the fact that you had intended to travel home with him that night, and that therefore it was a likely enough thing that he should call for you, knowing the Foreign Office well, upon his way. When I heard that some one had been so anxious to get into the bedroom, in which no one but Joseph could have concealed anything—you told us in your narrative how you had turned Joseph out when you arrived with the doctor—my suspicions all changed to certainties, especially as the attempt was made on the first night upon which the nurse was absent, showing that the intruder was well acquainted with the ways of the house.”

“How blind I have been!”

“The facts of the case, as far as I have worked them out, are these: this Joseph Harrison entered the office through the Charles Street door, and knowing his way he walked straight into your room the instant after you left it. Finding no one there he promptly rang the bell, and at the instant that he did so his eyes caught the paper upon the table. A glance showed him that chance had put in his way a State document of immense value, and in an instant he had thrust it into his pocket and was gone. A few minutes elapsed, as you remember, before the sleepy commissionnaire drew your attention to the bell, and those were just enough to give the thief time to make his escape.

“He made his way to Woking by the first train, and having examined his booty and assured himself that it really was of immense value, he had concealed it in what he thought was a very safe place, with the intention of taking it out again in a day or two, and carrying it to the French embassy, or wherever he thought that a long price was to be had. Then came your sudden return. He, without a moment’s warning, was bundled out of his room, and from that time onward there were always at least two of you there to prevent him from regaining his treasure. The situation to him must have been a maddening one. But at last he thought he saw his chance. He tried to steal in, but was baffled by your wakefulness. You remember that you did not take your usual draught that night.”

“I remember.”

“I fancy that he had taken steps to make that draught efficacious, and that he quite relied upon your being unconscious. Of course, I understood that he would repeat the attempt whenever it could be done with safety. Your leaving the room gave him the chance he wanted. I kept Miss Harrison in it all day so that he might not anticipate us. Then, having given him the idea that the coast was clear,

I kept guard as I have described. I already knew that the papers were probably in the room, but I had no desire to rip up all the planking and skirting in search of them. I let him take them, therefore, from the hiding-place, and so saved myself an infinity of trouble. Is there any other point which I can make clear?"

"Why did he try the window on the first occasion," I asked, "when he might have entered by the door?"

"In reaching the door he would have to pass seven bedrooms. On the other hand, he could get out on to the lawn with ease. Anything else?"

"You do not think," asked Phelps, "that he had any murderous intention? The knife was only meant as a tool."

"It may be so," answered Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "I can only say for certain that Mr. Joseph Harrison is a gentleman to whose mercy I should be extremely unwilling to trust."